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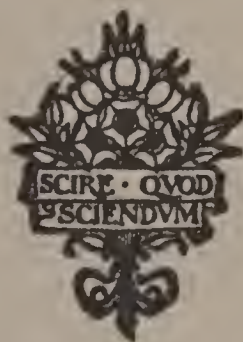
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FOLLY

FOLLY

BY
CLEMENT WOOD

Author of
"MOUNTAIN," "NIGGER," etc.



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FOLLY

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CHAPTER I

THE BLACKBEARD GETS HIS MAN

IN the days when Bristol was the first port of England, ships docked within hail of High Street and Corn Street. These were great honest ships, laden with sugar from the Antilles, with wine from France and Spain, with dark merchandise from the African coast; tall sober ships loaded with cloth for the Baltic, the Levant, and farther havens. There were other craft that hardly nosed in from Severn Mouth, but paused warily at the lips of Channel Gorge; ships poised for sudden flight, if need arose: crimping sloops, smuggling craft, and great uneasy vessels that flew any flag in a port, and the darkest flag of all on the open sea.

Within the inner city, where High and Wine and Corn and Broad Streets lay, the roadways were at best narrow lanes, built over crumbling cellars. In all but the few widest of these, even a sugar cart might be wedged between the fronting houses; in any, it might and often did go tumbling down into the underground vaults. A coach in these flimsy alleys was unthinkable. There was scant room

for jolting trucks of wares drawn by dogs, and for jostling companies of the wealthy on foot, with their train preening along in rich livery.

This was the inner city. But down by the docks, at the head of the Channel, the foul little lanes twisted and cowered, hardly better than rat runs. Bristol, the all of it, was the black heart of the slave trade with the new colonies in America. These warped lanes were the center of a traffic as dark, the crimping game. Many a well-shouldered man and strapping youth had been shanghaied and shipped senseless before the mast, to any port of the seven sullen seas.

All this Master William Leigh, of Canyng Manor, knew well. He knew a score better reasons why he should have kept his untempered youth near the great sheltering bulk of St. Mary Redcliffe, rather than under the forbidding walls of this evil region. But he was young, briskly young, with all the assurance of mature nineteen: did not the London blades play at being Mohocks, and tempt the blackest hutch and cranny of the teeming capital? And what hole could be blacker than this Link Lane, with no light its whole squeezed stretch but a curtained glimmer now and then, from behind which drunken hiccoughed songs and catches stained the night's silence?

He had started out alone, with an hour to kill: he had been cautioned to avoid the Gorge, and by now he was more than waited for. The hour had

long died, in this endless odorous black sink of the sea town. For the last quarter of an hour, moreover, he had grown in unease, until by now he wished heartily that he were anywhere but in this smelly murk. For, a quarter of an hour before, he had first noted that he was no more alone. There were feet behind him, heavy feet, two pairs of heavy feet. Walking as daintily as a cat, he had even been able to make out how the footfalls differed, and had begun to picture, in his stirred mind, the men that must drive on those dogged pursuing feet. There was the heavier thudding pair, that crunched stone and wood, for all the care in putting them down; there was the somewhat lighter, more careless pair, that scuffed along at times as if unwilling to hold to the pursuit. He held his nerves as taut as he could. It could not have been more than a quarter of an hour, though already it seemed a black eternity. The bright world, to him, had long shrunk to one narrowing dark road, peopled only by himself holding ahead in troubled spirit, and by the two invisible things that followed four full steps back from his heels.

Once he had quickened his steps: the feet following had quickened no less, and no more. He had scuffed slower; the pursuit had slackened as much. Evidently, then, they were not ready yet to annoy. In the utter dark, he could not turn and pass through them. So far, at least, he had kept ahead: and there would be a moon soon.

He knew enough about the Gorge to recall that this murky rat-hole was called Link Lane, and that he was almost at its end. Beyond it lay the darkly shivering water; he would not be well set, with it at his back. Time would come, too soon, when he would have to turn and face in the blackness the heavy thudding boots and the lighter scuffing pair; and then—— He tightened his hand joyously on the hilt of his sword; what was youth for, if not to meet darkness and danger? At the lane's end, moon or no moon, let come what would, he would turn.

And then a heavy door creaked suddenly open a score of feet before him, and threw a yellow stain of light on the fouled way. In one glance he saw that it was a tavern, with a Hogshead as its sign. His thought drove swiftly ahead; he could cross the stretch of light, turn, and see who followed. But that would be less the man's part than to turn now, and eye down the skulkers with the threat of his youthful sword. No sooner thought, than he swung lightly on his heel, and from the light faced the darkness, hand idling along his hilt.

The feet came on—heavy thudding feet, lightly scuffing feet.

“C-can you tell me, fellow,” the words chattered a bit in spite of his will, “where lies Avonmouth Road?”

All the time, his quickened senses built what

was happening in the darkness before him. Heavy thudding feet were coming implacably on; lightly scuffing feet had stopped—no, they were whispering around the denser darkness beyond the light, circling still out of vision.

Then, too quickly to separate the impressions, the yellow flare was peopled with a pair of great heavy boots, dank draggled hose, a fouled brown coat, and then a face above them. He hardly weighed that the man was heavier than himself, and forbiddingly tall; the youth's glance turned from the blackly shining eyes to something more blackly shining—a great black beard, commencing almost at the eyes, which covered the whole face, with its beribboned ends caught over the man's huge ears. Everything faded but the sight of the horrible beard: it grew in excited eyes to a hairy black monster, a menacing perturbation in nature.

The beard opened, and its mouth spoke to him, in a huge voice vaguely rasping. "Here, behind me—" He pointed with a vast claw hand up the way he had come, with a wavering gesture to the left.

And then, too late, Will Leigh knew what the scuffing shoes had been up to. Before he could leap away, it came—the ringing thud in his ears, the stabbing pain on the back of his head. His body slowly crumpled to the mired ground.

"Tally three," the black beard said coolly, nudging the prone victim with his toe. "Flat as a

flounder. An' a skimpy enough bit this 'un is, pox take him. But it's all one with Cap'n Pett; hands, he says, an' hands he gets. He'll make a man out of 'em, Bloody Pett will, he says, in or out of a tarpaulin bag. In or out, Murden!" with a gross chuckle. "H'ist his legs, an' lug him along; feather, he is." He slipped accustomed hands under the slim shoulders, and raised the limp weight easily. "Now for the *Black Nan*, to hand up this bale o' dry goods."

"They're all awk'ard an' heavy," the man called Murden grumbled. "Heavy, an' awk'ard too. Come on, Teach—let's tote him in the Hogshead, an' have a bouse. This is dry work."

"Sling him aboard first," meanwhile jostling the body up and down, as if to press the other's aid.

The slighter man shook his head. "Now, Teach, I got my rights, by the Rules."

"Well, up with his legs, an' hustle——"

"Side door?"

"Lug him in; nobody in the Hogshead minds a commodity like this."

The man with the black beard shoving from behind, and Murden grumbling awkwardly ahead, they passed into the main taproom, and on into a side room. Their entrance did not cause a ripple among the half dozen men who stood morosely guzzling there. When the body of the shanghaied youth, thus casually bundled along, bumped the floor in the passage from room to room, one or

more of the men looked up, and looked away as quickly. One of them, a sallow man standing nearest to the door of the side room, looked back, more curiously: he started suddenly when he saw the young man's face in the wavering light. For a moment he blinked curiously after it. Then he mumbled something to the tapster, sidled for the outer door, and vanished quietly into the darkness.

"Make mine a beer," growled Murden, as he reappeared in the main room.

The Blackbeard lifted his nostrils in a sneer of nodding ferocity at this vulgar taste. "Bristol milk, Jem, an' presently!"

His companion looked across at him with suspicious disfavor. "You ain't nobility, Teach. One would fancy you was Mayor Canyng's dratted ghost, slopping up Spanish wine, instead of a man's brew!"

"Your best brew, mind you," directed to the tapster. He turned on his associate with an answering scowl. "You don't know what a man is, Murden, pox take me if you do! A man's a man as knows nobility ain't a man, it's a pest. It's a plague. It's a bloody Black Death. Ed Teach is good as nobility any day, an' better too. Maybe my dirk hasn't said so! I be flea'd alive, if it hasn't. It was nobility bunted me out of Her Dratted Majesty's dratted navy, that it were. Me, I drink my Bristol milk like a man; an' no son of a crimping Will Canyng'll say me no."

“Thar she blows!” snickered one of the drinkers, a small man with a pocked face and a dapper little red beard.

“Want a pop in yo’ gullet, Pimple?” His hand rested negligently on one of the pistols stuck in the beribboned sling over his shoulders; his face was a vast black meteor.

“Eh, Teach, can’t ye take a joke?”

“I bury jokes. That’s good brew, tapster,” licking his lips noisily. “Finish up your ha’penny beer, Murden; we got work still.”

“Heavy work, an’ awk’ard.” With this he grumbled his way back into the dim side room.

The man with the black beard stood over the huddled body on the floor. “He’s talkin’,” he said. “Mark him, now.”

The voice came faintly from the youth, still dazed from the thug blow. “Wh-where am I?”

“You’re in the hands of friends,” sneered the leader of the two crimps. “You’re to take a sea-jaut for your health.”

The youth started up from the floor, seeking to sit upright. The effort was too much; his head wilted down into his trembling hands; he pressed them fiercely against his temples. “For the love of God, men——”

“Friend o’ yours, is He? Maybe He can help you.”

“I—I’ll give you money—anything—— You can’t ship me away; I’ve got to — I’ve got to stay.”

“H’ist him, Murden.”

The young hands trembled out, and caught pleadingly at the daubed hose of the man with the black beard. “You’re a Christian man——”

“Me a Christian, you—you fuddled patch! That’s a funny fowl to call Ed Teach. Christian, eh, Murden? Me!”

“I can’t see, hardly—— My head’s ringing dreadfully —— Money —— I’ll give you money—— You say you’re a Christian——” The voice trailed away.

“He’s out of ’is head, Teach; thinks you’re a dratted parson, maybe.”

“You’ll save me, sir!” Again the trembling hands clutched at the man’s legs. He began to regain command of himself; a note of studied courtesy crept back into his voice. “You don’t want a mere stripling, like me, sent down into the unchristian hell of a voyage before the mast, under one of these brutal Bristol skippers! I’ve been told of the horrors, my man; you can’t know——”

“Lean back against the wall, mate, an’ rest yourself; you’ve a long voyage ahead,” said Teach drily. “*I* don’t know the horrors, you say? *I*?” He tapped hollowly on his chest. “Reg’lar ol’ scarecrow I am, you think maybe? Reg’lar ol’ dead monkey? Matter o’ thirty-eight years ago I was born in this same rat-hole of Bristol you may have been dropped in; matter o’ sixteen years later, I was bunged on the poll, an’ shipped over to the

islands. Hell, you say? It were hell, all right. Didn't Black Codd, the ugliest mate ever sailed out o' Bristol, didn't he beat me an' lash me every livin' day o' that trip? What with bein' kicked around by the old man, an' the kiss o' the cat-o'-nine-tails if I didn't hop like a hare when the bloody mate coughed, I know what it's like, I do. Ed Teach don't know the horrors, you say, may the plague take you!"

"I—I'm sorry——"

"An' look at me now," he stuck his villainous face suddenly before the younger man's, till Will could not help but shrink. "It made a man o' me, that's what it done. I were second mate, I were, on Her Dratted Majesty's dratted *Leopard*, I were, privateerin' out o' Jamaica. Me! An' dropped like a red shot, now they've wormed together a blasted peace, they call it, an' me rated an' cashiered! But they can't come over Ed Teach, my lad! Cap'n of a crimpin' gang, I am, lawfully elected. An' hark you——" his great black eyes bored out of the black-bearded meteor of his face, "that's what you may be, if you've got guts in you! We'll make a man out o' you—me an' Murden an' Bloody Pett—instead of a sweet-stinkin' young lordling. You may even be a crimp, some day!"

"Master Teach, I will be a man; that score's mine to mark. But I choose a pleasanter, manlier way than being trundled about like a hogshead

of sugar, and shipped blindly before the mast. But it's not for myself I'm pleading. I could stand it, and make you hop when I come back—for I will come back, never fear, and I shan't forget you——”

“Listen to the cockerel! Devil take me, but the boy's got somethin' in him, eh, Murden?”

“By your leave,” with aloof courtesy, gradually warming to his message, “I plead for another. I have a young sister, of an even wilder nature than I—Heaven shield her—a madcap hoyden, who must needs have my arm and my sword.”

The black beard lifted, the black eyes glittered in amusement. “My arm an' my sword—a good round phrase that. I must note it.”

“We have neither mother nor father living, my sister and I. The aunt who reared us, Mistress Jane Bodham, has just died of the plague, Heaven rest her. My sister is alone in Bristol, and I am to take her to London. Without me, she will be more alone there than ever. Sir, you'll have to let me go! Think of the plight of that seventeen-year-old girl! With me away, anything may happen to her—anything!” He ceased, lips slightly quivering.

Teach leaned back against the wall; a moody shadow came to rest on his face. “Well, let it. Let it. What of it?”

“But—have you no sisters? Have you no mother?”

“Mother—I never knew what mothered me. I had a sister—her name was Jane, too. A fair-favored wench she were—as clean as a flower. London, you said: it was there she journeyed, an’ on what they call Ludgate Hill she set up a shop, sellin’ ribands and gloves. I had a sister.” He paused, lidding his eyes.

“And is she——”

“O, you shall hear. Two damned young gal-lants, such as you’ll I doubt not grow to be, finding she said ‘No’ to all they said, set on her at dusk with their footmen. She had her turn served, yes. They pulled her body out of Thames, the watch did, ten days later; not a pretty sight—not a pretty sight. That’s how nobility has served me an’ mine. Why should I fret at what may hap to sister of yours?”

“You can’t be so cruel-hearted! I beg you, in the name of your merciful Saviour and mine——”

“You beg me! Who are you?” With a rhetorical, downward curve in the tone.

“I—I am Master William Leigh, of Can——”

“You are not,” the words hacked out. “You poor zany, you’re my hogshead of sugar, trundled about to be shipped blindly before the mast—your own words they are. You’re my commodity. I sell such as you to them as buy such, an’ must, to earn an honest penny, since the dratted Queen’s men turned me off. Can a hogshead of sugar plead to me? Can a commodity tell an honest

merchant, like Ed Teach, where it would be sold, an' where not? You're nothing—so many pence—so much beer for Bully Murden, so much Bristol milk for me. You talk? Not a word! Lug him along, Murden; he can walk now. To the *Black Nan* with him!”

“I beg you——”

“Walk him on, man—an' stop your pretty mouth, or I'll stop it for you!”

The Blackbeard blazed at him so terrifyingly, that the youth could not say more. The man called Murden pulled him lurching to his weak feet, and started him for the door. The other crimp circled them, shielding them from too much observation from the others in the main room. So they passed out of the yellow dimness of the Hogshead, and guard and prisoner turned down to the docks, while Teach faded into the quick blackness behind them.

“An hour,” chanted his harsh voice out of the darkness to the others.

Will Leigh heard his companion chant back in answer, “And another.” Then he found himself hurried on down the soggy way.

He collected his mind as swiftly as he could, and kept his peace until they were more than three-score rods from the inn.

“Master Murden,” he said gravely, “you have it in your hands to be a rich man from this night's work.”

“There’s not that much pay in your bloody carcass.”

“From me, I mean. I follow the Earl of Westport; I am to travel in his train tomorrow. He is wealthy—none wealthier, as you know; I am worth much in his eyes. All you need do is to report back that I twisted and gave you the slip in the darkness; there is a matter of five golden sovereigns now for you, and as many more I’ll leave where you say tomorrow.”

“We’ll get your gold, don’t fear——”

“They’re shrewdly hid; and five more tomorrow, where you say.”

“Keep your sovereigns—I know Teach. What he wouldn’t do to my bloody head—he’s a hard an’ cruel man, Teach is. I wouldn’t dare— Cruel he is, an’ hard too.”

“I’ll let you join my company, if you seek to leave this crimping life.” Promises in such a moment, he reflected, must not falter. “Or I’ll pay you well, when I get my hands on money coming to me. Thus, you see, you will line your own pockets, with no loss to yourself.”

“Walk on, I say. I know Teach.”

“My sister, Master Murden——” His voice sank lower, trembling with depth of feeling, “Folly is a lovely girl, and a needy one, with none but me to stand between her and the world. You had a mother—a sister—some woman dear to you — Think of her, and in her name spare me, for

the five golden sovereigns—you'll get them now—and five to come tomorrow! If you do not, and ill come to her—I vow I'll harry you on land and sea, and no Teach will suffice to save you then! For the girl's sake——”

“I belong to the crimpin' gang; if I play false, it's death.”

“It's worse than death for that fair girl, if you do not. And—to let me give you the slip in this darkness— As a man, I plead with you! I'll palm you the five sovereigns now——”

“Gold, you said?”

Will held his voice level with difficulty. “Gold,” he repeated simply. “Five more, at noon tomorrow, in the north confessional at St. Mary Redcliffe—all gold.”

Murden faltered, studying him. “Your sister needs you?”

“She has none other.”

“There is a maid I— A good maid, too. I ha' warned Teach to let her be. Gold— Slip me the five sovereigns, an' God guide you back to the inner city, young fool, for I cannot do more for you.”

“Here—hold your hand— One, two, and two— five—I'll never forget this, Master Murden——”

“Good fortune, young master——” his voice shook in the darkness. “I know Teach——”

There was a sudden unseen commotion beside him. The body of Master Will Leigh tumbled

again to the damp road. A voice split the darkness like a torch: "My pistol is on your heart, Murden," the harsh voice of Teach whispered forth. "I'll call Pimple an' the others—then settle with you for this night's lily gizzard!"

CHAPTER II

THE BRISTOL TIDE RISES

THE Blackbeard set fingers to his lips, and blew a queer wailing whistle. A startling hush followed the eerie call: for a long moment the night held its breath.

Murden's voice chattered out, a scared, sick tone: "Put down your gun, T-teach; I was a-takin' him——"

"You lie in your throat. I heard all. Steady there—I can see you——"

Murden's hand dropped bloodlessly from the dagger's haft he had reached for. "I was a-takin' him, I say——"

A quick padding of many feet, out of the darkness behind them—constantly louder and closer.

"An hour," chanted the Blackbeard swiftly.

"—And another. You, Teach? What's toward?"

"Take this young rogue's body to the *Black Nan*. See Pett himself, partic'lar; from me, say. Me an' Murden has business elsewhere. You're in charge, Pimple."

"Good. You'll be aboard, I'll tell him?"

"Soon enough. An hour."

A softly chanted answer, "And another."

The others hurried away in orderly fashion. The two men were left to front one another in the darkness.

“I’ll go—” began Murden, with a choked gasp.

“Steady, steady,” warned the Blackbeard. “Me an’ you has business to settle first, Murden. Hand over that nasty dirk— No pistol, eh? Now mark me—I’ll just have you step backward down Bilge Lane—there’s a sweet, quiet spot on the docks at the bottom, where me an’ you can sit an’ talk this little matter out. Backward, now——”

Murden shivered, eyes closed. “I—I demands a trial, right an’ fair, before the comp’ny——”

“When I caught you nuzzlin’ your bloody head with the prisoner’s, an’ with the bloody gold in your hand? Pass it over, an’ presently, while we’re minding it. Five, it were— There. Now, walk!”

“I demand——”

“You know the Rules. Spare your breath.”

“Teach, I’ll get you—” His body bent evilly outward; he took one step back, as if about to spring on his pursuer.

“You get me—with this gun betwixt us? You ain’t man enough. Go on—watch out, here are steps. Backward, I said—like a dolt of a crab, as don’t know enough even to walk sideways. Go on. Go on. Sixty-two there is—you didn’t know that; it’s Ed Teach’s job to know everything. One more—there. Now, out on the dock with you!”

“I demands a fair——”

“Bully Murden, you’re dead already. That’s Rules. I couldn’t spare you, if I willed to. Not that I ever liked your ill-favored face; I mis-doubted but you were crooked, all along. More steps now—slow, slow— Dead by the Crimps’ Rules you are; and in my hand it’s put to end you. I don’t dodge a duty; not Ed Teach. An’ the best way to end you——”

“Listen, Ed——”

It was small interruption. “You’re a rat, so you could drown. A dirk’s clean an’ quick. A pistol’s quicker, but wasteful of powder. An’ it’s a messy death, after all.”

The man’s breath came in quick gasps. “Teach, you’re wrong! I took his money for you! I were going to——”

“You’re goin’ to go to the devil, your master, with a lie on your lips, eh? No. You’re dead already. I’m just decidin’ exactly how you died.”

“I think you’re the devil yourself, you an’ your foul black beard.”

“Then the devil is Ed Teach, an’ we’re even, me an’ him. Steady, there! No tricks, or I’ll blow your bloody heart out. Steps again——”

“I—I can’t walk any farther. My limp pains——”

“You’re not walking the plank yet. Go ahead.”

“The wharf’s all rotted—I can feel it givin’——”

“As rotten for me too. We’ll stop soon enough——this is the last level——”

“It’s slimy, Teach—I’ll slip——”

“As slimy for me too. Heh! There’s help, off to your right. I knew the moon——” His voice stopped, his eyes bored the gray murk where the culprit crouched. His eyes glittered, his face twisted more horribly, in the wan light of the low moon. “You nasty ditch-scum! Another dirk in your hand—goin’ to knife me, eh? Pass it over _____”

Murden’s left hand reached out, the handle of the dirk toward Teach; his face lidded in contrition. As Teach was about to grasp it, with tremendous speed he flung the arm upward, the naked blade poising above the Blackbeard’s startled face. Down the steel tore toward its goal, while Murden’s lips gutturalled black joy at the turn of fortune.

Like thought, Teach acted. His pistol hand clenched below the wrist that held the dirk, his empty left hand tore at the other’s throat. Murden was strong with desperation; a wild lunge almost threw off the great, punishing claws. Both slipped sideways on the slimed boarding; Teach first thudding to his knees, and dragging Murden slowly down to the same posture before him. They were strained in dreadful deadlock a few seconds; then silver beads of sweat oozed out of the younger face, and a groan was tortured out of Murden’s lips.

“You’re breakin’ my arm——”

“Drop the knife——”

A groan, and it thumped heavily on the wharf. It slid in silent grace to the edge of the planking above the water, and disappeared.

Teach scrambled to his feet, his grip still holding the other twisted down before him. “I’ve a mind to end you here an’ now——”

“I swear to God——”

“Get up, an’ walk. We’re almost there——”

Sullenly the other obeyed, smoothing his strained hand, his face warped in pain. Step by step he continued backward, on this last damp level above the water. The low, round moon washed the scene with a sickly smoulder of gold.

“Ain’t this far enough?”

“End of the pier. Steady! What——”

Suddenly the man before him sank to his knees again, as if a great hand had yanked him down; a wild scream came from his lips. There was no attack in his attitude; his hands pressed with all his force against the pier’s planking, while he struggled as if caught in a huge vise below.

“I’ve fallen in, Teach—this hole— I can’t pull up! Reach me a hand——”

A sardonic smile grew slowly above and below the great black beard. “Come on, lift yourself, man——”

“I’m caught, Teach—the wood’s rotten on top, and firm under. My whole leg—I can’t—Reach me a hand, I say!”

“Come on, pull yourself out. We’ve got farther to go——”

The man strained and writhed, with no success. “You’ve got to aid me——”

Philosophically Teach sat himself on the bottom level of the last row of steps, half a dozen feet away. Pulling out a long black pipe, he crammed it with strong twist. With painstaking care he lit it, and puffed contentedly without speaking. Murden’s appealing eyes were fast to his every movement.

“Will you reach me a hand?”

“Quite a moon,” Teach observed. “Me an’ you has seen a lot of full moons together, Murden. Funny to think this is the last, eh?”

“Hurry, Ed——”

“The water smells nice, too. Smells of Jamaica, an’ the Caribbees; smells of the Tortugas, doesn’t it?”

“For God’s sake——”

The harsh voice drawled casually on. “Mighty few boats stirrin’, this white night. There’s the *Black Nan*, just down the Gorge.”

“Teach, I beg you——”

“By now, our bale’s delivered on board. Sorry you didn’t do it yourself, eh?”

“For the devil’s sake——”

“Well, what will you have, for my sake?”

“Will you give me a hand?”

“Not I!”

A more open horror settled on the face of the trapped man. "You wouldn't shoot me here, like a wolf caught in a trap?"

"A rat in a trap, you said? No, I won't have to shoot you. You're out of my hands." He puffed lazily, staring off at the dim gray horizon.

"You won't— You mean you won't kill me?"

"That's just what I meant to say. Your master, the devil's, got you, got you fast! I won't have to lay finger on you."

"What do you mean, Ed Teach? I don't like your strange looks there——"

"You'll know soon enough."

There ensued a slow quarter of an hour of waiting. The long pipe sent up quiet volleys of smoke, that eddied low along the wharf, and occasionally misted around the head and face of the caught man.

At length his voice whined out, "I'm wet, Teach—wet to my bloody waist."

"You'll be wetter."

"Give me a hand, Teach! Then you can kill me, like a decent crimp."

"No. Not I. Providence—the devil's providence—has taken you out o' hands o' mine."

"What do you mean, you—you devil?"

"Listen— Don't you know now?"

"I hear nothin'."

"Nothin'?"

"Nothin', I said—absolutely nothin'."

“Then nothin’ will kill you,” with a deep chuckle, not good to hear.

After a pause, a scared voice, “Teach!”

“Listen again. Still nothin’?”

“—But the water.”

“You want more than that?” The voice purred its great easy menace.

There was another silence. Then, like a gasped explosion, it came: “Teach, it’s full moon—it’s spring tide!”

“You ain’t such a zany, man.”

“The water’s up to wharf level awready!” There was panic in the rushing tones.

Teach leaned toward him, his voice croaking. “An’ comes up eighteen feet, eh? Matter of eighteen feet or so. An’ you ain’t that tall, Murden. Not that tall. Why should *I* kill you?”

Desperately the held man threshed his arms about, seeking somehow to squirm free. Panting in racked sobs, he spoke again. “You won’t leave me here to drown, like a trapped rat, Teach?”

“Rat is right. No, I won’t leave you. It’s a quick tide. You’ll drown before I leave.”

“You—you devil!”

Carefully the other man knocked out his pipe, and stuffed it full again. Again he lit it, and watched the smoke circle up lazily toward the pale sky. He gestured toward the other man. “Could you ask a nobler death, now, Murden? The great Atlantic narrowed into Bristol Channel, an’ Bristol

Channel narrowed into the Gorge, all to float your craft away? Would you have me move you to Chepstow, where the Wye lifts fifty feet at spring tide? Would you have me bring you back at the neap, where you'd have but a paltry six foot o' water to drown in? Man, you're drownin' like a king!"

The other's eyes were shut, to hide away the damp horror creeping upon him. "Devil, devil, black devil," his lips continued to chatter.

"What a sightable spot the Gorge is, Murden—Bully Murden as was—at the full o' the moon! There's silver netted in the riggin's, an' nestin' on the tops an' the high spars—see it in those boats anchored in the roads, an' even out in the offing. Even those fouled old warehouses washed with embers of silver—you're dyin' like a king! An' die you must, for you broke Article Seven of the Crimps' Rules, clear an' open, an' you know death is named for you there. Look at the moon on those whitecaps, Murden— No, the ones further out."

"Leave me die in peace."

Slowly Teach rose, shaking his immense frame with burly grace, and yawning out his arms with a comfortable smile. "I'll have to climb up a couple of steps—it's damp already here, under-foot. You won't mind my movin' a mite up, will you? You can still beg me to pull you out——"

"O, I beg you——"

The voice crooned serenely on, “—An’ the more you beg, the happier I am to refuse.”

A strange change came over the face of the trapped man; eyes glared above ghastly cheeks, voice spoke with a new, throbbing intensity. “Edward Teach, you spawn of hell, I’ll haunt you till your dyin’ day for this foul night’s work. I’ll come back to you, wakin’ or sleepin’— I’ll make you shiver, I’ll——”

“Make Ed Teach shiver? You haven’t life enough to ha’nt a cat. It takes a man to make a decent ghost. It’s a dirty way to die, I grant you, Murden; you earned it by livin’ dirty. Every man’s got it in him, he can live clean or dirty, just as he culls. We’re crimps, both of us; I’m a clean crimp, an’ you’re a dirty one. I never left a partner, or sold him out, or took gold to let a man go—an’ I never will. You couldn’t find my conscience, if you cut me open, it’s that black; but it’s polished an’ shinin’ black, just like my beard. You couldn’t ha’nt me.”

There was a long silence, broken only by the hissing, gurgled lapping of the water. Teach, with a satisfied look at the other man, went two steps higher. The lower level of the wharf was already covered with a darkening film of sea; the little waves came up blackly, sniffed at the edge of the planking, stuck out their foamy white tongues to touch the man held there.

Another cry from the inner depths. "It's wet to my breast, Teach."

"Eh, too quick, too quick. You're dyin' easy. For such as what you done, we might roast you over a slow fire; that's what Kidd done to a man sold him out to the authorities. We might prick you an' leave you to bleed to death, the Portugee way; or keel-haul your foul carcass. You're dyin' easy."

"Pull me out, an' maroon me somewheres, in the name of black hell!"

"Maroonin's for the black gentry; you ain't man enough to h'ist the pirate flag. No, you're well ended as it is, barrin' it's too quick."

"—Up to my neck, Teach!"

"An' I thought that neck was made to be stretched out—to be hanged like a dog, an' sun-dried. Murden," a chatty friendliness in the tone, "I been watchin' the moonlight silver against you. It breaks like gars or porpoises. I wish you could see it; it's too pretty a death for such as you."

"For the love of Christ, Teach!"

"—An' the devil."

The water was now wetly fingering the face of the trapped man. Suddenly the head fell dully forward, without a sound, until only the dark mop of hair was visible. There should be a final cry, Teach reflected; but no further cry came. A man might at least keep his head up to the last minute, and even then hold his hand out of the water. If

he were dying that way, now— But not Murden; probably fainted off, like a sleazy wench.

The wavering mop of dark hair was hardly to be seen now; it bobbed gently, as the low waves broke over it. The black beard moved up two more steps, and then a third, picking a comfortable seat. When he looked again, he saw nothing but the gray-washed expanse of waters. There was a darkish shadow—the man had been there— No, it was a bit closer— It was not there.

Slowly Teach stretched his limbs, and rose to his feet. The extra dirks he fitted into his belt, and stowed the five gold sovereigns more firmly into his pouch. He filled his pipe again, lit it, and turned his back on the moonlit quietude of waters. Up to the head of the wharf he climbed, and so on into the mounting darkness of Bilge Lane.

He wondered idly what it felt like: dying. And how a man would go about trying to be a haunt. Must be a weakish, puny sort of thing, flitting and flopping about without a body, where you couldn't even rightly touch a thing; hard, that is. Scaring women and children! Down there with the crabs— A good swig of Bristol milk, now, would go down right. He mustn't slip seeing Bloody Pett, and collecting for that live cargo——

When he turned from Bilge into Link Lane, he stopped suddenly, lifting his nose as if to smell the air—to smell some disturbance in it somewhere. It reached him as a hostile scent reaches an animal.

Something was amiss. For one bristling moment he wondered if it could be the spirit of Murden, come so soon to annoy him. No; not that. The man's spirit was drowned with his body. It was something—something else. He listened painfully.

It came to him now—a confused distant tumult, not loud, but threatening and intense. Far ahead, in the faint, moonlit obscurity, he located the source of the disorder. It must be about the Hogshead Tavern—yes, it was there. Could it be a fire? There was the golden stain of flames on the walls— No, it must be from torches. There were men, many men, in front of the tavern. What could be stirring so openly in the Gorge at this dead hour?

Stepping with careful speed, he drew closer and closer to the scene of the confusion. Yes, there were men, a large cluster of them, there under the flicker of lifted links. He made out with a noiseless outer group of dark figures, that swirled closer and closer toward the open door. As he neared, he recognized the cloaked figures of the watch beyond the door—port watch, and those of the inner city too. In their midst the bright attire of men of importance. Behind and before them was the dumb crowd retched up by the dark Gorge.

Well sheltered by the circle of dark figures in front of him, he wormed nearer and nearer. Now he made out the man who was talking to the watch,

in a loud bullying tone—evidently some man of note, from the jewel and tissue on his coat. What he was saying Teach could not make out; he tried to get close enough to overhear. There was a woman beside the man, too—some grand lady, from the richness of her attire: a comely, high-spirited face, Teach noted with approval.

She was saying something pleadingly to the man with the big manner, although the black beard still could not make her words out of the confusion. The crowd around the watch suddenly shifted. The imposing man took three decided steps down the lane toward the water; his associates eddied behind him. To right and left the alarmed crowd melted away in front of Teach, flattening against the side walls. He, having less of fear than most men, kept his place, a scornful sneer on his black face.

A moment later, he regretted his rashness. One of the watch from the inner city, whom Teach knew, suddenly broke out in excited cry, pointing a long arm straight at the crimp: “There he is!”

“What——”

“Where?”

Out of the quick babel, the voice of the watchman rose to a shriek. “I see him, I tell you—Teach! There he is, right there!”

“After him!” A thunder of insistence from the great bullying figure.

A smile, as brief and startling as summer lightning, shot over the crimp's face, and left it scarred into a sneer. With a sweep of his long arms, he caught the two nearest men, and dashed their heads together, flinging the tangle of bodies and arms and legs upon the ground. Against this living reef the first leaping pursuers collided and stumbled, adding to the sudden wall of safety. Teach's lips sounded high above the tumult the queer eerie whistle that summoned his crowd, as he sprang twistingly away down the dark lane.

"After me!" he taunted over his shoulder.

As he reached the first side lane, he threw a steady glance backward, to read the situation. They were free at last, pox on it—after him the whole procession streamed in headlong confusion.

Well, this way would do as well as any. He swung himself into the deeper darkness.

"I seen him!"

"There he goes!"

After him the hue and cry grew louder, fiercer.

CHAPTER III

OUT OF THE GORGE

ISAAC SCATTERGOOD walked slowly home from Fourth Day evening meeting, at just the hour that Will Leigh had turned down into Link Lane deep in the Gorge. He stepped from the narrow street into his yard, walking cautiously over the place where the paving had given, and that horse had fallen and broken his leg no later than last Fourth Day. Meditatively he shook his head, like any sober Quaker, in pious vexation at the ills with which Providence had seen fit to inflict him. Were any of the Friends, indeed, so troubled? Item, young Isaac had not been at meeting; item, Prudence had answered with a touch of pertness at evening meal, and Folly Leigh—what was there about Folly that did not irk him! In return for his kindness to Jane Godham, on her deathbed she had willed over to him the care of the girl and her brother, until her relatives, her great relatives in London, were ready to receive the children. From the moment that Folly had entered the orderly Scattergood household, all had been topsyturvy.

He was met at the door by Mary, his wife. “How was the meeting, Isaac?”

“It went well—a blessed silence for almost an

hour. Then Will Upham, the joiner, was moved of the inner light to speak on election. A zealous young convert; it heartened me to hear him summons this evil generation to repent, or burn in the lake of endless brimstone. But where is young Isaac? He was not there——”

“With Folly, I suppose; the young ones were chattering and folderolling profane songs not an hour ago.”

“Has thee not sent the maid to her bed?”

“O, Isaac, as well ask if I have sent night to bed, or bid the rocks sprout wings! Can one make Folly do anything against her whim?”

“If thee would be firm with her——”

“Here she comes now, with the children tailing her, as ever.” The prim wife smiled tolerantly. “Thee try being firm with her, for a change.”

A gay laugh, that seemed to sway the candles in their sockets, and she swung into the room. There was a stern look on the elder man’s face, and a motherly fret on his wife’s; but, in the picture they saw, there was nothing to call forth sternness or care. She stood poised within the door, her head thrown back as she laughed; the sweet curve of her neck flashed back the candlelight. She was tall, for a girl, and as slim as a boy, and straight as a tulip-tree. Her mobile mouth, indeed all her features, were delicately firm and strong; under a crown of wistful brown hair, her blue eyes gleamed with eerie beauty and directness.

She spoke—the last and loveliest of her graces. “I’m sorry, good people—were you talking? I had to laugh—poor Isaac was so shocked—” Persuasive, seductive, her tones were tunes; her charm of speech won all who listened—except, of course, Friend Scattergood and his wife, who were ever on the lookout for seductive devices of the evil one.

“Shocked? Thee says he was——”

“Oh, at nothing, I assure thee. I was just telling him what Eddie Innis had told Will and me—you know, sweet young Viscount Innis of Inniscourt, who’s growing so fastidious and sensitive that it’s a mere agony to watch him lift a dainty handkerchief to his nose, poor thing—he wasn’t always that way, of course——”

“Thee are very roundabout, Folly.”

“Oh, it was nothing. Eddie had told us about a great ball at White Hall, at which the second Charles led the first country dance, with the call ‘Cuckolds all awry’——”

“Folly! How can thee——”

“Oh, everyone knows about it,” she plunged brightly ahead. “Good old Charlie told them all that it was the oldest dance of England. And I told Innis the call was royal autobiography; and he said——”

“Folly Leigh,” said the old Quaker sternly, “this is enough. Folly is thy name, and folly thy nature! It is an evil hour for England when her

daughters yawp of Eddies and Charlies, and foul their mouths with 'cuckold'."

"It is not a sweet hour for England, Isaac Scatergood, when kings and princes of England make cuckolds of the men of their land! Only yesterday Innis told me——"

"Peace, peace. No wonder young Isaac blanched at thy words! Thee and thy brother——"

"Oh, where is Will?" She was off at once on a gay tangent, her blue eyes softening with a wistful pucker. "He promised me to walk an hour, and no more. Is he returned?"

"I have not seen the boy," grudged Isaac.

"It's no way of his to overstay himself another hour. Where can he be? Perhaps at Uncle Westport's——"

"Thee has not spoken to that godless man, child!" Mary, the mother, spoke out of her mother heart.

Folly's chin tilted adorably. "That godless man, dear Aunt Mary, is my uncle the Earl of Westport, the greatest peer in the kingdom—Will says so, and he is wrong in so many things, he may just as well be right in this. No later than today Will had audience with him, and tomorrow—tomorrow——" she clapped her hands in delight, "we go to London with him and his lady! He has promised it all to Will; kinsmen, he told him, do not grow on mulberry bushes."

"But his name is an evil reek from Weymouth

to Tweed. Surely some soberer relative ——”

“My aunt spoke well of him, Friend Isaac; and, at that, we have decided, Will and I. If the boy is there——”

Prudence, the daughter, stepped slightly forward, a mysterious glow in her somber eyes. “I know where he went, dear Folly.”

“Well?”

“He purposed to walk an hour into the mouth of the Gorge, he told me; binding me to whisper nothing of his intention. It is more than that now, alas.”

“The Gorge! And he has not returned?”

Isaac Scattergood faced the situation straightly. “The Gorge is the abode of the evil one, the spet stews of the world. There is no villainy strange to it. If Will Leigh has gone there, he has pledged his soul to the devil, and I wash my hands of him!”

“I’ll wring the neck of any, devil or otherwise, that touches him!” Folly tensed herself like a warrior maid. “I’ll go into the Gorge after him, and presently! Will thee come, cousin Isaac?”

“I——”

The father interrupted, a wry smile twisting his face. “My son, lock the froward chit in her room, if she persists in this insane folly.”

“I’ll—I’ll——” her lips trembled a trifle, then hardened to a straight, thin line. “He is my brother, and I will—I’ll get out, some way, and ——”

“Have you no self-restraint, no sense of what is becoming at all? No woman can go into the Gorge, and come out without draggled skirts.”

“Oh, if I were only a man! No; I will show what woman can be. Cousin Isaac, will you——”

“I forbid your accompanying the madcap on this wild jaunt, Isaac.”

“Oh, if you were— I’ll go straight to Uncle Westport; surely he will——”

Behind his father’s back, Folly saw young Isaac making intricate signals, laying his finger upon his lips, and nodding profusely. Like a flash she caught it. Her eyes widened once, then narrowed. Her tone softened persuasively. “I go to my kinsman Westport, Uncle Isaac; my brother may be in danger——”

“At this hour—through Bristol streets——”

“My brother may be in danger.” She spoke with aloof finality. “Adieu. My cloak, Prudence——”

No protest, he saw, would avail; the stern Quaker strode into an inner room, almost stamping in exasperation. With a bewilderingly bewitching curtsy to the three who remained, Folly made for the door, and swung out upon the darkened street. As she left, young Isaac thought, she took with her the light.

For a moment she faced the murk blankly. She had no idea where Westport lay; and she knew the crouching fangs of the city. But, even if she had

not received young Isaac's signal, she would have gone on. Prayer might not move mountains these tepid days; but determination could slice through them.

Sure enough, before she had covered half of the square, she heard the young Quaker's hurrying feet at her heels. As she slowed up, they caught up with her—not only Isaac, but Prudence as well, her eyes demurely sparkling.

“Good. You know the way, Isaac?”

“I can ask——”

Tentatively they made for the corner, eyes alert for one of the watch, who might give the desired word. But their search, it turned out, was not needed. Before they reached the turn, a stain of light washed the dark, silent houses, and a marching company under torches turned into the narrow way. The three young people shrank back into a depression in the walls, their eyes on the unusual group, ready for trouble, if trouble came.

Suddenly Folly darted forward into the middle of the street, leaving the two young Quakers gawping after her.

“Westport!” her voice sang out triumphantly.

“Uncle Westport!”

The two head torchbearers stood aside, the two men at arms gave way, as she stopped in front of the central figure. Stephen, Lord Colford, Earl of Westport, Viscount of Satterleigh, Baron Harkness, Knight of the Bath, Lord Great Chamberlain

of England, was at this time in his forty-seventh year. Young Isaac Scattergood had heard of his distinguished progress, as of the doings of some great swaggerer on an English Olympus. As Folly called the name, his eyes glued themselves on the great man in the flesh. He saw a tall, sturdy fighter, with a great grizzled head disdainfully set upon broad shoulders. He was clothed magnificently in a velvet coat of golden apricot, trimmed with azure; his waistcoat, of velvet too, was cherry colored; breeches and stockings were of gold silk, and his gold shoes were buckled in sapphires and rubies.

The nobleman's eyes kindled with admiration at the apparition of loveliness that the night had conjured up before him.

“By the devil's wife, fair Mistress, I am proud to have so fair a thing as yourself stop my way! By God, you'd blossom in any court in the world! How may I serve you? Say but your word——”

She was not so much awed at the magnificence, as taken aback at the unexpected speedy termination of her quest. “Uncle Westport——”

“*Uncle*, dear lady! You cannot be the helpless young sister of my young kinsman, Will Leigh——”

A low, sweet curtesy; the blue eyes held him from under lifted lashes. “I am Folly Leigh, my Lord.”

“Of all the winds of godly chance! I came to seek you this instant——”

“And I to seek your Lordship.”

Both bowed with stately ceremony. “Mistress Folly,” he spoke with abrupt vigor, “I have this night received evil news concerning your young brother. A man——”

“Evil news!”

“Ay. A man of mine saw him struck down by a crimping gang, led by some misguided son of a mizard named Leach, or Veach——”

“Teach, Your Lordship—Edward Teach,” prompted one of the watch at his side, a man cloaked in black.

“I’ll do the teaching, plague take him, before I finish with the black rogue. I came to notify you, before proceeding down to Severn Mouth, and recovering the youth.”

“Good. Now that we are met, we can go right ahead,” she ordered crisply.

“I shall,” he retorted pointedly. “Shall I have you sent back to your residence—or, better, to my palace, where my lady will see that everything is done for your comfort? That would be better ——”

“That will be admirable,” she corrected with sweet firmness, “as soon as we have rescued dear Will. Shall we go ahead?”

“But you— You cannot— A maid like you

was not made for midnight alarms and the clash of stark steel. I will send you——”

“A maid like me,” she assured him simply, “was made for far more, I suspect, than Your Lordship dreams of. I go along. Will you give the word?”

“Well, I’ll be eaten! You’re quite a woman.”

“My two friends,” she amended gently, “had best return to their father; they have risked much to come thus far with me. I’ll see you both again”—giving her hands to both and her lips to Prudence.

“Good. Give the word, Henry.” Gesturing Folly to his side, and leaving Isaac and Prudence staring owl-eyed from the side of the street, Westport stepped forward, and the stern march was resumed.

As they passed down endless dark narrow lanes, the nobleman explained to the girl what little he knew of the mischance to Will. Tom Hunnicutt, one of his indentured men, had been given three days’ leave to visit his wife; and, it seems, the man had commenced spending his offing down the Gorge, with some disreputable cronies. He had been drinking in a tavern, the Hogshead, when he saw a great ugly black man and another strike down a well-clad youth in front of the opened door, and had seen them drag in the body and dump it upon the floor of the next room. As their inert burden was carried past him, he saw, to his horror, that it was the young kinsman of his master, whom

he had admitted to the nobleman's presence only the day before. What could he do against the two men? he pleaded; especially as all in the Hogshead were Teach's crimp-mates. So he had rushed back the word; and had admitted further that he knew the name of the ugly black man, one Edward Veach or Beech——

“Teach,” corrected Folly gently, hanging with wide eyes on every word of the story.

“Teach or Screech, he is the villain we are to get. There was mention of a *Black Nan*, Hunnicutt said, on which they were to take the boy. With all this news, we'll get him, and no fear.”

“Here are the Port Watch, sir,” said the obsequious city watchman, venturing up behind the distinguished man. In a few crisp sentences, Westport explained what he wanted: Will Leigh returned, and Teach, dead or alive.

The head of the Watch, a constable who named himself Giles Camford, shook his head dolefully. Much as he regretted not being able to oblige the distinguished Londoner, this was Bristol, and it was as much as his life was worth to venture down into the Gorge at night. If proper complaint was laid before His Majesty's Court, which met in a fortnight, undoubtedly justice would be done in proper course. Besides, there was an error in the report; Teach was an honest man, a hard workman, he could assure the other; the informant evidently was entirely mistaken.

Westport stood no more of the evasive fumbling. "Hark ye, Master Camford," his tongue scorched out with sudden harshness, "I know you, and who you serve. For all I know, you get your penny out of the blood-money of this same Teach. That your master, the Mayor, shares in the crimping profit, I know well. You get that boy for me, and presently, do you understand the Queen's English? And that black rascal Teach as well—is that clear?"

"Why, Your Lordship——"

"And if not, hear my word: I'll have the trainbands of London down on your neck before a week is past, with a Queen's writ to clap you into jail before you can say Jack Robinson, you and your scurvy mayor as well! There you may rot your head off, for all I care. If you city swine think you can come it over a nobleman of the Queen's own court——"

"Of course, Your Lordship, if you wish——"

"I more than wish it; I command it. By the devil's black wife, will you do as I say?" His voice roared out its insistence—made all the louder by the appealing clasp of the girl at his arm.

"But surely, Your Lordship. I only meant ——"

"Lead ahead; and haste this night's work, or you'll rue your delay till the worms have supped on you!"

The darkness was cut again by the moving

torches, as the augmented parade set forth down the Gorge. Any tendency toward delay, on the part of the converted Constable Camford, was met by a stern word from Westport; and, in due time, they drew up in front of the Hogshead.

By now, Camford's sly insistence had partially achieved its purpose. Over and over again he had represented the Hogshead as the one law-abiding place in the Gorge, its keeper as a scholar, a model of sobriety, and Teach as a godly ex-naval man. The very repetition carried some weight. The lean, studious host of the Hogshead, summoned by the Watch, came out, and listened civilly to the complaint. Folly, her hand still on Westport's arm, noted how silently the lane before and behind was filled with a dark crowd of quiet, sullen men, who stared unblinkingly at the strange scene.

The host of the tavern, in staid restraint, insisted stoutly that no crimps were allowed within his walls, and that the whole story was a disordered dream, or an invention of the devil's self. He had not seen Master Teach for three days, he said.

If Camford's word had impressed Westport, Folly had judged him differently. She did not like at all the sly Mongolian twist of his eyes, the putty-like complexion; his continued protests turned her away from crediting him, in the end, with any truth.

She clung closer to her uncle's arm, whispering

in his ear, "They are both liars, good uncle. He was here—in these walls! I feel it deep within me. Make them drag out this Teach—or let us go to the *Black Nan*——"

"It will go hard with all of you," asserted the nobleman ferociously, "if you seek to deceive me. I'll have the roof ripped off every hovel in this pest-hole, and let that round moon in, if you seek to smoke me in your lying sport. Where does this Teach lie?"

"He is no longer in Bristol, Your Lordship," said the host suavely. "He left some days ago—three or four, at the least. The *Black Nan* sailed at sundown, I am sure of it, or just after. I myself, tomorrow, will see what can be learned of the youth you miss——"

"We go to the harbor now!" thundered Westport, taking a step, and then two more, down the dark lane.

The crowd, dumb and watching in front of him, melted away to right and left, flattening against the side walls, not so much crushed as waiting.

Constable Camford, sensing trouble, nudged himself forward, as if to cross in front of the nobleman. At that moment, one of the city watch gave a startled cry, pointing a black arm into the shadows. "There—there he is!"

"Where?"

"There's Teach, I tell you—right there!"

One moment the whole group saw him, idly

scornful in the center of the way. Nonchalantly alone, with the silvery murk behind him, he stood revealed in the torch glare, the pistols swung from the bandolier over his shoulders, the great black beard reaching down from his eyes, and looped up with ribbons over his ears.

“After him!” thundered Westport.

There was a wild swivet between them and the solitary fugitive: men tumbled from right and left upon the ground. Behind the *mêlée* came a queer haunting whistle. Then a mocking call, “After me!” and he was gone, leaping into the night.

The procession sliced somehow through the tangled men on the ground, and streamed wildly down the narrow darkness. Twice Westport felt a man lurch into him from the rear, so that he almost lost his footing. A faint cry from Folly let him see that she too was being handled roughly. There must be friends of the crimps, he saw at once, in the quiet scum crowd.

“To me, Westport!” he bellowed. His retainers, the torch men, the watch from the inner city, fought their way to his side, knocking the impeding crowd right and left: they had been schooled for just such a call. The Port Watch had oddly disappeared, except for their head, who had been so deeply impressed by the nobleman’s threats that he clung, like a grudging shadow, on the heels of the other man.

Even with the mob hemmed away, it was rough going—steep, muddy, a maze of crisscross passages; and long ago all sight and sound of Teach had been lost.

“To the quay,” commanded Westport. “We get the boy first and then——”

Down into the widest of the rat-holes they plunged. Under one low wooden passageway, and startlingly the houses opened into a broad, moonlit level, with the wharves beyond.

“Which way?”

A suave irony was on the constable’s face, as he pointed simply out into the silvery Mouth. A great ship, under full sail, was vaguely seen, fading out beyond the offing. “The *Black Nan*,” he smiled regretfully.

“And—Teach?”

“His sloop lies at the next pier,” volunteered one of the inner watch, earning a black look from Camford.

“Hurry—lead to it!”

Back they ploughed to the foot of the steps, bent to the right, skirting a vast black warehouse, came to grief in a long blind alley, and at last, gasping and perspiring, broke clear on the right quay. There, at the side, lay the sloop, sail up; the last topgallant was bent as they watched, and began to draw.

They ran straight towards her, to find their way suddenly stopped by a stretch of water, where the

pier had been divided into two long parallel fingers upon the stream.

Westport stopped, glared impotently around. His thoughts raced: by skirting toward shore, they could reach the right wharf——

And then they saw that the sloop was moving.

“After me; out with your guns,” he ordered, running down the length of this finger of the pier toward the open water. Folly flitted like a shadow just at his heels.

As he reached the end, he stopped, the girl just beside him, the others a half moon at his rear. The sloop had reached the end of its pier now, and, instead of tacking away from where they stood, turned to windward, and made a half-board. This brought it coasting right toward them, almost within leaping distance.

By this it lost most of the slight headway it had. So close it came to the pursuing group, that every detail of the small ship could be made out. There, at the bow, stood Teach. He cupped his hands into a trumpet. “If England has no use for her best sons,” he thundered, “there is one flag that has! Let my black beard be its symbol. Men, up with the Jolly Roger!”

Amid cheers from those on board, the black square, silvered in the moonlight, slid smoothly to the peak of the fore-truck.

“Ten pounds to the man that pots him!” suddenly roared Westport.

“Our pistols are out,” warned Teach, “and our cannon primed. One shot, an’ I’ll blow the last of you straight to hell. We leave in peace,” he sneered loudly.

“Hell’s wife,” groaned the nobleman. “We’ll take this to the Queen, Mistress Folly, and see what she will say to this flouted piracy!”

A mocking laugh from the sloop, as she tacked to starboard, and picked up headway. Westport and the girl stood staring after her until their eyes stung. Then they turned reluctantly back toward the inner city, with London as their next goal.

CHAPTER IV

OFF TO LONDON

FROME MANOR, which had originally been built by a Berkeley, was the Bristol seat of His Lordship of Westport. He decided that he would first take his young kinswoman there.

On the way back from the lower harbor, he drank in such as he could of the fresh sweetness of the maid. More and more he marvelled at her beauty of face and form, her vibrant certainty of disposition. A high-spirited piece, without mistake; long before they had reached the Manor, he had begun to bless the stars that had removed that pleasant young cub, Will Leigh, and had substituted such a charming changeling in his place as Mistress Folly.

Westport, in common with the leading men of early post-Restoration days, had not patterned his life upon any accepted saint in the Calendar. He had rather read widely in the narratives of the Roman empire, and at times entertained the whimsical idea that he was a reincarnation of potent Augustus, or at least of great Julius. Not that their warlike and statesmanly activities especially held him; it was the less known private lives of the Romans that he modelled himself upon. Julius, he

recalled now, had been known as "husband of all women"; and he had at times apprenticed himself toward the same title. But with such a girl as Folly Leigh beside him, he decided that the old Roman would have spurned the general honor.

"Is there nothing you can do?" she asked in some vexation, interrupting his luscious fancies.

"What would you do, my dearest cousin, if you were in my place?"

"I—I'd have ordered the Queen's warships out, to get poor Will off the *Black Nan*, and to hang that rogue of a Teach from the yards of his own toy boat. What a weak, hateful face he had!"

Westport chuckled slightly. "Hateful, perhaps. As for me, I hold a commission in the Queen's land forces; devil a bit of power have I in the navy. If it had been my nephew, the Admiral—"

She clung at his arm, lifting her bewitching face up toward his. It was all he could do to withhold a kiss here and now. "Your nephew—an admiral?"

"Poor Chris!" His chuckle was tolerant. "He's only a lieutenant on leave—Lieutenant Maynard, if you please, who should have been with us tonight, but that he was off on a charge of mine. You'll see the boy soon enough—— But even a lieutenant in the Queen's navy could have done no more than I, with one of those testy naval sea-grampuses that rule Her Majesty's wooden walls."

She returned to her theme. "And there's nothing you can do now?"

There was something, he assured himself inwardly; and that was to make this dainty bit his own as soon as possible. Mistress Betty Treadway was due a long holiday, he smiled acidly; what little charms she had were wearing thin, and this girl was nothing but charm. He could hardly answer her this way, however.

"We'll do what we can," he condescended. "Of course, you'll stay at Frome Manor tonight; and as long as you will. It is your home now."

"Will told me—the Queen——"

He planned rapidly. The Manor was deucedly small, at that; and his wife, the Countess, was very much in evidence. The campaign needed elbow room. In the palace at London— "Decidedly, yes. This week Lady Westport and I leave for London; it would have been tomorrow, but that I am stayed here a trifle. You will go with us, or perhaps I'll send you on ahead, squired by Chris."

"I shall make my plea to Her Majesty," the soft cheeks burned red, "and have her send her fleets to scour the ends of the earth, for Will!"

"I shall present you to the Admiral of the fleet; if you'd pay his price, my dear, he'd do what you would."

"I'd pay any price——"

"*Any* price?"

“In honor, of course——”

“The honor of the Court?” Cynically he insisted upon pulling her maiden spirit down to the sophisticated level of his own.

“Oh, that—— The Court, my dear uncle, will not ask of me more than I am ready to pay. You need have no fear on that score.”

“I’d scour the seas for you, if I could name my price, plague take me if I wouldn’t!”

“I wouldn’t see the plague take you, of course,” she tempted him demurely.

“And if I could collect earnest in advance——” His heavy brows lowered around; the faint shimmer of moonlight pandered, but the tramping retainers were too close for fame and comfort.

“For all my name, you will find me earnest enough,” she punned cryptically. The simple words flushed his fancies, until they reached the street where Isaac Scattergood’s light still burned.

At their knock, he came down to the door himself, his lean face bleak, ascetic. In a few curt words Westport explained the girl’s altered plans.

“If the maid has made up her mind——”

“Of course I have, dear Uncle Isaac!”

“Then I have no more to say. She goes with thee, much against my will.” The night grew chiller at his stern frown. “Her aunt, Mistress Jane Godham, was a godly woman; and I know naught of thee, Stephen Westport, to hold thee

godly. Folly is a froward miss, and has jangled our orderly household excessively.”

“Uncle Isaac!”

“I speak in no unkindness, Folly. There is no room for folly, in a house lit by the Inner Light.” He lifted his eyes, and spoke as if he saw through the man and woman who faced him, and indeed far beyond them: there was a rapt bleakness on his sharp face. “In good time thee will see me again. Make godliness thy concern, and sober decorum thy daily going; or the wrath to come, which will char to a cinder this wicked and perverse generation, will kindle around thy young head too. Repent, while there is yet time!”

“Come, come, old man—the maid is a good maid,” blustered Westport uneasily.

“Aye; still. God be praised for that! May each year keep her so. Fare well.” Stiffly he turned, and soundly the door tapped to behind him.

“And I have lived with that,” said Folly simply, “for three months. London cannot come too soon!”

When they reached the Manor, the Countess welcomed the girl with a motherly caress, and packed her off to bed at once. Tomorrow would be time enough to talk. And so, in a room that seemed itself a palace, among velvet hangings and yielding painted beauties, beneath curtains of lace and coverlets of silk, Folly Leigh entered into her new estate.

Sleep came slowly. Her eyes surveyed again the pinched days when her mother and father were alive, now so far gone; and the bleaker days following, under her shrewd and vinegary aunt. After her, the stern Quaker had not seemed an essential hardship; for at least Prudence and young Isaac were companionable. And now, under the awkward wing of His Lordship of Westport and the gracious Countess, with a Queen's receiving room at the end of the glorious way——

She slept like a flower on a moonless June night.

Somewhat after nine, a plain girl with a pleasant face roused her, informing the drowsy miss that she was named Hannah, and was to be her maid from now on. With this unaccustomed aid, Folly was soon attired for breakfast, and found her way to the low-beamed dining hall. Lost in its center was a small table set for four. Westport and his wife came in together, and at once accepted the girl into the family group.

“That's for Chris,” the Countess gestured to the vacant place. “He doesn't usually sleep late——”

“Nor have I today,” his voice sang gaily out, as he shouldered through the swaying curtains. “Up at six, to attend to the post horses—— Oh!”

Demurely Folly kept her eyes on her plate, and rose at Lady Westport's signal to curtsey her acknowledgment of the introduction. The aggressive Chris seemed a trifle ill at ease: preserving

her silence, she studied him without seeming to have eyes for anything but the bewildering variety of viands.

Her uncle, Westport, was tall; but this young man was taller, with a fine open face and hair so light that it was almost flaxen. There was power in the face, power and good-humored tolerance, rather than apparent brilliance. He seemed some jovial Viking chief of older time, quite out of costume in his sober gray coat of dulled silk. In a naval costume, Folly decided, he would look quite overpowering; as it was, he was all of a man—the sort of man that any miss would pick out of a crowd; the sort of man that a shrewd miss could whistle up and down the wind at her will. His shoulders swayed when he talked, until the room and the beamed ceiling seemed to sway in sympathy; she had a sense of a rocking floor beneath her, of man's moving habitation upon the heaving waters. There was a breath of the sea in his speech, and the blue of the deeper sea in his leveled eyes.

“Your aunt and I, Chris,” began Westport ponderously, “leave for Westport Court in three days. You will set out today with Mistress Leigh and Her Ladyship's gossip, Mistress Blick, as well as the maid Hannah. I know that you will take every care of your fair cargo——”

“What I can do——”

“You’re forcing poor Chris to blush, Westport,” rallied his wife.

“In my day, it was the women who blushed.” He sat back to drink in the applause for his wit.

“Today is a bit topsy-turvy, Your Lordship,” and Folly shrugged a noticeable shoulder.

“He’ll be cautious enough to suit you,” continued the great nobleman.

“To suit *me*?” Folly paid him off neatly.

“Damme, the girl’s got spirit; eh, Isabel? She’ll turn the heads of half London, if she keeps that up.”

“What’s wrong with the other half?” queried the girl demurely. With this, the breakfast broke up, and the preparations for the start to London were hastened.

To her relieved delight, Folly found that her thoughtful protectors had already sent to the Scattergood household, and that her slim worldly goods were already gathered and packed.

“Never mind, my dear,” the Countess consoled her, “there are tiring-houses in London; we’ll have you robed like a princess soon enough. You’re sure this is all? You’re all ready, Blick? I think they can start, Stephen.”

“A kiss for your relative, my dear,” he smacked his lips in anticipation, and made what he could of the rebuff of a soft cheek. “Tally Ho! Till London, then!”

“And God be with thee,” benisoned Folly gently. And so they were off.

Pleasant riding it was through the road leading southeast of Bristol. Folly, the gossip, and the maid, were the sole passengers in the coach; Maynard rode on ahead, with three attendants, in view of possible dangers on the road. The coach was pulled briskly enough by a team of four; the roadway was firm and well tended. Maynard, eager for an excuse to see the smile that woke the face of the girl, like the sight of the sea after an hour's hemmed struggle through dry bracken—so he smiled the comparison to himself—rode back beside the coach window, his explanation being that she might desire to talk about the state of the road.

“I can't believe we are really on the way,” she hailed him gaily. “If you knew what London meant to me!”

“If I knew what it would mean to you, I might be easier in my mind,” he shook his head soberly.

“My dear Lieutenant! Do we make it in three days?”

“Three?” His voice soared. “If we do it in four, we are fortunate. More likely five; it's all of a hundred and thirty miles. In the better season, four; but, with the rains for the last six weeks——”

“The road seems good enough,” she wondered.

“It's altering even now. Look! Still firm where

you ride; but it's all mud a foot beyond me; and, at the foot of the next steep hill, the ruts begin. The way is simply execrable."

"What are ruts and perilous descents, to a knight squiring a lady fair to the world's heart, London? Ride forth, bold Sir Christopher, and if any dragon of might and mire thwart your way——"

"You're making sport of me now."

"I would it were not sport," with a calculated melting glance in her eye. Folly had made no precise plan for her conquest of London, though this was her hidden hope. Yet she knew vaguely the way, and she would have been less than woman if she had not turned the battery of her charms upon this mannerable young man who rode so seriously and pensively at her side.

The result to Maynard was as devastating as she could have wished. Unconsciously his hand tightened on his rein, and the horse's head drew inexorably nearer to the coach window. He said nothing; but his face, coming closer and closer, hung on hers, like a moth's seeking to scale the hot cliff of a lamp chimney.

And then, to her amazement, the head bobbed briskly downward, describing an astonishing arc, and then curvetted up almost out of sight. She could see his practiced hands, for all of his sea life, tightening the rein, and soothing the mettlesome mare.

“Only a hole in the plagued road,” he gritted between clenched teeth. “Whoa there, Bonnie! Merely a mud hole, my lady.”

“The first dragon,” she sighed dreamily.

“Slaughtered,” he added significantly. “But I fear I shall have to ride ahead—the way is hardly two wheels’ width now, a ribbon of firmness on a gown of quagmire. I ride forward——”

“Speed doughtily, my knight,” she teased him again.

With the look of a man who held a strange bright bird in his awkward hands, Chris Maynard rode on. His face held a spell of far romance, that the girl saw. Without planning, her raillery had summoned the one high mood in him. For he was youth: and youth is happiest to dwell in the faint glamour of forgotten wonder, and to postpone the shock of combat with reality, no matter how sweet its end, which is flowing water and a spread table to maturity.

After a few civilities with the taciturn Mistress Blick, Folly turned her attention again to the road. One steep hill was followed by another, with awkward climbs between; with gaping fresh-washed gulleys across the way on top of the hills, and yielding fenlands and bogs in the valleys. From ahead came the querulous endearments of the coachman and his aid to the four straining horses. Even with these profane vocal caresses, it was all the horses could do to keep the coach run-

ning evenly, and, at times, to stir it at all. Truly it was a devil's road.

She felt the left wheels, both of them, slithering soggily farther to the left; and the coach tilting an abrupt trifle, before it jolted to a rest. There was a straining; cries from in front; Chris's voice raised above those of the two drivers. She lapsed again into her dreams; after an over-saturation with them, she looked out again. They were not moving. Chris Maynard was nowhere to be seen.

She made a motion to open the door. "I wouldn't, my dear," expostulated her companion.

Folly, with a conciliatory smile, opened the door. They were not bogged, that she saw; but there was some trouble up ahead. She could not see clearly; she heard a confused bickering. One distasteful look at the mud below, and she decided at once she must hold her place of safety. At last she caught Chris's dogged face, flushed from his vehemence, as he rode back toward the coach, a dozen feet ahead. She waved him gently toward her.

"Nothing," he gritted explosively. "A dratted stage wagon, blocking our way. I've told the plagued carrier that I'd run him through, if he did not draw outside the road."

"Into that mud?" she marvelled.

"Into the bog, for all I care."

"Can I see?"

“They’re ploughing by your side now. You’ll get more than an eyeful — not a pretty sight.”

The straining wagon did not appear, to her disappointment. At length their coach got under way again, and then it drove by the mired freight conveyance. The girl had a clear view of the carrier’s lowering face, the piled goods just behind him, and an apathetic huddle of passengers squatting in the straw of the wagon.

“Travellers—in that?” she queried idly, seeking to hold him in talk.

“They have no coach, and cannot pay the stage fare; so they take potluck on a wagon. A clean, swift journey!”

On and on the coach lurched and grumbled. At length it sloughed widely to the right, and came to rest partly across the road. This time Folly could not see ahead at all. The desolate road stretched behind, no living being in sight. Two horse travellers skirted to the muddy side, jaunty in spite of the black mire clinging to their saddle skirts. They gave her a mocking obeisance, took one look at the stiff form of Chris erect in his saddle, and lessened out of view. After an interminable pause, Chris himself rode back to where she sat, curbing her impatience as best she might.

“Another wagon?” she asked hopefully.

“Another dragon,” he assured her solemnly. “He is slain, shall I say?—but his body lies across

our path. We are stuck, my lady, no two ways to it."

"Well—— We are stuck. Can the horses do nothing?"

"Their backs are galled with straining. They can do no more."

"We spend the rest of our lives, then, domiciled in this muddy Eden?"

"Is it Eden to you, too? No; what horses cannot do, kine can, I trust. I have sent on for two teams of cattle, from the nearest farm; ultimately we will be pulled out, like an ulcered tooth; like a finger out of taffy," he amended, shaking his head.

"I do not like your muddy taffy, Sir Knight; and—to be called a sore tooth! But—smite on, in Valor's name!"

"Look," his voice was level and suddenly tender, "is that not worth being stalled for?"

She studied the flaming copse with distasteful eyes, that suddenly brightened to an eager interest. "Deer—red deer! Look—there are more—and there!"

"The coachman warned me we might see them. There are more than five hundred in one herd hereabouts, he says. Isn't that an amazing sight!"

"That doe, there—nibbling the late leaf buds, almost within a stone's throw! This is a sight."

He looked over his shoulder, at a commotion in front. "A different cattle have arrived. By your leave——"

After another wearisome wait, they were under way again. This time, she found herself flanked with a personal bodyguard. Half a dozen stout stolid hinds tramped to right and left, propping the coach with their arms and shoulders, and holding it upright. With this strange dumb company they ploughed down the valley, and only saw the last of them when the road rose again.

Soon enough they drew up in the yard of the White Bull, and she could print her feet on sward again. Maynard escorted her ceremoniously into the private room of the inn, almost forgetting the chaperone in his obsessing devotion. As the inn servants set the table for a belated meal, Folly stood at the window, watching the bustle in the inn-yard.

“A relay of horses?”

“And six this time,” the lieutenant expanded proudly. “Four have done their best—but the next stage, geographically at least, is far worse.”

“This is my first journey to London, remember. Have you relays all the way?”

“Twice a day, all the way to the capital. Only Westport could do it; he, and perhaps half a dozen great officers of state. Relays are for royalty; and the Earl stands almost that high. The innkeeper told me,” he continued irrelevantly, “that a coach foundered in that mire yesterday, overturned, and shook up all its passengers sorely. One serving woman was almost scalped, when her head was

thrown against the coach roof. We did well to have those farmhands stand by to steady us."

"How could you do other than well?" she rallied him gently. He gave her tit for tat, and the meal passed with gay lightness.

There was the rumble and bustle of a new party in the yard, coming from the London way. Chris left, to make final arrangements. Folly at length turned to watching the dusk shadows deepen on the melancholy yews that stood, like woodland sentinels, just beyond the brief sward. The wind within them soughed a melancholy chant; there was a long level moaning, like her own far sea. She could hardly rouse herself out of the mood of dejection, when Maynard appeared again. His long face was no tonic, she saw at once.

"I fear we lie here tonight, my lady. The darkness is almost upon us, and the road ahead is nothing. The floods are out, I have learned, on the next stage."

"But you said you would push on to the Pipe and Feathers tonight! Europa may have slept with her White Bull; but I choose the road, and what lies beyond. Let's push ahead—we're young and the night's young!"

"Not tonight," he nodded regretfully, "nor tomorrow either, I fear. The floods are out. Perhaps after three or four days——"

"But—but I must get to London!"

"What if we are a day or so behind Westport

and his lady? They take the northern road, and that is much drier. I have talked with a very decent fellow who has just arrived—a naval man like myself—and it is impossible.”

“Three or four days!” There was real consternation in her voice. “Don’t forget my brother’s situation; every day’s delay is added to his plight on that beastly ship that took him away.”

“Judge for yourself. They were two coaches when they started, this man tells me; the other stopped at the Pipe and Feathers, unable to go farther. What I tell next happened between there and here. Crossing a swollen ford, the coach was swept over, and the passengers had to swim for their lives. Lieutenant Crossthwaite and the one woman and two men with him had to mount horseback, and be conducted across meadows; the water well up to their saddle skirts all the damp way. When the coach was finally pulled through, free of its passengers, the men had to walk or ride half of a day, while the lady was carried on a litter, and the coach brought after them, divided into parts. That surely is not travelling!”

“It may be better now. You see, we must get to London!”

He shook his head firmly. “After three or four days——”

“Horse back? I ride well,” she suggested hopefully.

“No, sorry as I am to refuse you anything. Westport told me to be cautious——”

“Damn caution—let’s press ahead!”

“The road’s flooded; there are highwaymen, to pick off solitary riders. On the heath—the big one we cross next—Bloody Wynne often rides. You’ve heard of him—he has earned that name. No; it is impossible.”

“What if I refuse to piddle around half a week?” she flashed arrogantly at him. “What if I ride ahead, leaving faint-hearts behind?”

He smiled paternally. “If you plan anything of that ilk, I shall lie at your door—I warn you I’m a light sleeper—and simply prevent it, my lady. After all, it is to me that Westport looks for your safety.”

“You are impertinent, Lieutenant. If I decide to ride, I ride.”

“Women are not allowed such liberty,” he answered with assurance and finality.

“Are men?”

He searched her face in bewilderment, for a key to the casual question. “A man may do what he dares to do; a woman must be shielded.”

“Oh, how old you are!” she taunted him abruptly. “This is an age devoted to folly; and I am Folly. I know the custom of the old—men are the only triumphant ones. Under second Charley, women lorded it briefly: Lady Castlemain and Mrs. Stewart did as they willed, and all

England stepped aside to watch them. Under our ailing Anne, we are only dolls, if you will, for men to cuddle when they please, and lay aside when they please. The old day comes in again; woman today will do as she wills."

"But you know that a woman——"

"I know that such a woman as I has every whit as much right to ride over the rim of the world, as Rochester and Buckingham ever had. Take My Lord of Rochester: blowing at will upon the Queen's maids of honor, eloping with his wife before marrying her, writing songs to love——"

"They are low songs, Folly; surely you have not——"

"They are full of life; no droning Puritan hymns, God be praised! With Buckingham he stole an inn on Newmarket Road, and turned tavern-keeper, making the husbands drunk, and tumbling the wives at his will. Oh, and a thousand other pleasant sports. Innis and others——"

"You can call that pleasant?"

"For me, no; the utter reverse. For him, yes. He made the world bend to his will; as I shall make it bend to mine. For a woman can, giving or withholding her favors like a queen. Perhaps I shall withhold forever: I do not know. But I will have my will, whatever it be: and I will to go on to London."

"In my time," he repeated doggedly.

"Heigh-ho, the wind and the rain! We shall

see," she flashed back. He sensed the curbed bitterness without difficulty. It was a gloomy party that wasted the two hours till supper; and although Folly put on a vizard of slight raillery, Maynard was not to be drawn out of his glumness. Folly respected him for this; for all her mask of complaisance, she felt that he sensed somehow her intention, and for this she respected his sensitive wit. All the more she tried to hide what was in her head; all the more definitely he refused reconciliation. She had a feeling that she was under trial; she felt that her position was ridiculous, and bridled beneath. She was all the more honeyed on the surface; and liked Chris none the less for not sipping the thin bait over her intention.

After supper, he took himself off with the other naval officer for an hour at dice, leaving her to shift with Mistress Blick. Soon enough Folly was yawning, and had word conveyed to her escort. He explained briefly that he had brought his game to an end, and would light her up to her room.

She turned at the top of the stairs, to curtsey him a good night. She was like the Queen of Heaven, he thought, condescending to rain light from the bright stars of her eyes upon him, the dumb dark earth beneath. At the frozen aloofness behind her graceful gesture, he bowed with stiff pain, and watched her face, lit by the candle's soft flicker, eclipse behind the stout oaken door.

His face hardened into an unwonted sternness.

He took a catlike pair of steps down the hall. After a moment's fumbling before her door, as if uncertain whether to speak more with her or not, he tramped off to his own room.

The moon was rising, a bloody wound in the east; she knelt to watch it, her face against the harsh sill. Soon the wound healed to a great round silver scar; the hushed world without glowed in silver wonder. She rose on whispering feet, her face set.

Soon enough she had all ready. She held her breath, while she listened at the adjoining door, where Mistress Blick slept serenely. The inn was all quiet: only the multitudinous stirring of the silver world without was still alive. On whispering feet she stepped to the door, and turned the knob without a sound. Quietly she pulled the door toward her.

It did not budge.

More carefully she tested it; it held firm. Up and down, to right and left, she strained it; her ear caught the faint click, as the bolt of the lock met the plate within the stout door jamb.

Of all the impertinences! He had locked the door upon her, while she was unnoticing!

She stood fronting the door, her eyes closed, one hand cupped tensely over the other. Then her eyes lit like the night without; she floated silently over to the window. Gently she raised the sash. Hmm—— A good dozen feet; but there were

heavy ivy leaves all the way, still black green, for all the turning season. She tested the vine to the side of the window: as thick as her finger, it held without difficulty. Well, if needs must, she would!

Swinging a leg across the sill, she eased herself slowly down, hand over hand, feet securely nesting in the locked stems of the vine. Down, down—until a swinging step found firm sward beneath her.

She had done it!

Adjusting herself hurriedly, she skulked toward the back of the inn, hugging close to the protecting wall. The night was far too light to risk the chance of a restless eye from above. She stopped suddenly, as a puzzling noise reached her from the rear.

Then a smile, as she made out the sound of a bellows, and of thudded strokes. Someone working still, at this inhuman hour. Before her swung a heavy gate; confidently she pulled it inward, and walked through.

The inn farrier looked up in surprise. She ignored this easily. "Will you saddle my horse for me? I am to push on, with a company that has just gone ahead."

"Which horse, lady?" he owled stupidly.

She held her voice level, in spite of her delight. "The chestnut mare, with the white star on her forehead. I will show her to you——"

Obediently the yokel led the way; without difficulty she picked out the intelligent face of Bonnie. She stood by, while the man fitted saddle and bridle, and tightened them efficiently. It was a relief to note that the lieutenant's two pistols were negligently swung in the saddle holsters.

"Thank you, my man." A palmed coin, and she had vaulted to the saddle. The mare, as chafed at the inaction as the girl was, whinnied softly, and set herself for orders. A low cluck, and they were out of the stable, upon the velvety sward to the far side of the inn. With a bright bow to the astonished farrier, she stuck spurs daintily in the mare's flank, and kited around the corner of the drive, bearing under the tree shadows all the way. Not until she was a hundred rods from the inn did she dare take the center of the road.

Well, here she was, off for London once again. Let Chris Maynard whistle for her, when the cocks crew; he would have to whistle shrilly, to reach her ears! What were floods, highwaymen, and the anonymous dangers of the dark, when a maid's heart beat toward the court of the Queen?

She set the mare at an easy lope down the long slope in front of her. The caged bird was out again; the world was a road beneath her horse's feet.

CHAPTER V

BLOODY WYNNE

IT was a wild and desolate decline down which she was pushing. The moon at first made the going beautiful. But as the road slipped farther and farther into the lush vale before her, the way ahead darkened, the friendly light crept reluctantly up the boles of the trees, until it leapt upward from the topmost branches, and was at last only a gray streak seen between towering walls of living blackness. So far the track had been firm enough; but two slight stumbles of her mare taught her that the going was roughening, and she drew down to a walk. Confidently the mare picked her way.

It was an eerie journey, she soon confessed to herself; but she felt more at ease that the way was deserted. Bad enough to have the dismal calling of the owls and night birds ululating hollowly through the sighing murk; human night-fowl would have been far worse.

Abruptly she drew rein, and listened, her body tense. A noise—a roaring far tumult. She pushed on more quietly, half sure already what it was. The sound grew subtly closer: it was water, of course

—some river, unnamed to her, that had poured its flood to balk glittering Norman conquerors, that had barred the way to sturdy Roman civilizers, that had chanted its pouring song long before the first gaunt savage had skulked darkly among the dim shadows of an England long buried in living memories.

Closer and closer it came. The mare was in difficulty now, turning a puzzled head back to her mistress—Folly could tell this from the feel of the slackened rein. At the maid's encouraging sign, the mare pushed ahead with borrowed confidence.

Now it was just before her—the river bank itself. The stream was invisible in the dark; the altered timber of its song published its presence. The mare whinnied disconsolately.

The girl stopped again, to consider the situation. The chanted brawl sounded ill. Yet it must be the ford; and what others could cross under sun, she could and would cross in darkness.

She leaned forward on the neck of the mare, whispering into her ear. "You wouldn't disgrace me now, Bonnie, would you? If we wait, he may catch up, before day; he'd stop us, Bonnie, if he could; and we want to get to London, to the Queen, Bonnie, the Queen! Go on, Bonnie, good Bonnie—"

An insistent cluck, and the mare stepped down into the flood.

A few steps, and the mare was swimming easily. Folly drew her legs up as high as she dared, shifted the pistols to keep them dry, and trusted in the providence that guards the children of folly. She held the mare's head upstream with a tightened rein; the current was overstrong.

The damp journey seemed endless. Yet before her was the end, as she could tell by the louder bicker of flood against stones. She headed the mare straight for the bank. The steed blundered into steep rocks, shied away in desperate terror, began to drift downstream. Again Folly drove her at the shore, again, again; each time, landing was impossible.

Her eyes closed in a wave of faintness. Perhaps she had been borne by the current below the opposite side of the ford, and was being carried down to God only knew what dangers. She tried to turn the mare's head upstream again, to fight slowly for the lost advantage. The mare, desperate now, paid no heed to the utter pull. One final attempt at the bank, then: a bleak cliff buffeted and shunted mare and rider again away.

Low branches tangled in Folly's hair, and almost pulled her from her unsteady seat. There was nothing to do but trust herself to the uneasy mercy of the flood.

And then the mare, of her own accord, aimed for the land again, and made it. Up a stiff, black decline she blundered wildly, frantic hoofs claw-

ing into the mud as if they had been hands. Somehow she made the top of the rise, and there foundered suddenly to her knees. Somehow Folly was off—thank Heaven, the ground was firm; she soothed the frightened creature to her feet again. The girl adjusted the saddlebags, which were drenched from the long immersion, and mounted soberly. It was impossible to guess what she had escaped; perhaps, after all, the mare had crossed above the ford, and had ended at the right spot. She was tired, shaken and tired from the struggle. There was nothing to be done, in any case, but to go ahead on this road, if road it was. Up the long slope she sent the tired horse.

It was the road, without question. The streak of moon, high over the vaulting trees, grew wider and wider, lighting upon their highest plumes, then creeping with silver feet down their sides. At last the trees gave way to undergrowth, hardly head high, with only a rare leafy forest monster to blot the gray night with its shadows. She was on level ground again; and, as the trees grew scarcer and the undergrowth lessened, she knew that it was the great heath, rather than another hill, that lay before her.

Several times the mare stopped in perplexity, and could hardly be urged forward. Folly sensed at last that it was difficulty in finding the road that troubled her steed; for the way was not marked at all, and alleys and bypaths led off into the heath

at either hand, at bewildering angles. The best she could do was to trust to Bonnie; and this she did. The sky brightened sensibly: no longer the moon alone, for its full disk was paling: she knew at last that she was facing the faint glow that precedes the arrival of day.

Ahead of her lay a dark, vast hill. The mare, walking delicately now, came at length to its base. To her relief, Folly saw that there were at least no trees upon it; it was merely a great rise of the heath. She aimed the mare up its slope; from the top, when the light grew, she might be able to see the road ribboning away into the distance. Brighter and lovelier grew the sky; the air nipped cold with the chill of early dawn.

Again the mare stopped abruptly, and fidgeted in uneasiness. Folly lifted her tired eyes to the sky, and at once drew in a quick, sharp breath. She was not alone!

Before her, not more than a hundred yards away, a solitary horseman sat at rest. For all his aloof immobility, she knew in a flash that she had been observed. A troubling whimsey crossed her mind; could this be Chris Maynard, come thus early to circumvent her? At least, that would be safety.

No, this was not Chris: hat, cloak, everything was different. Trusting that she was hidden in the shadows, she bent her eyes up toward the solitary figure, to read its nature. It was hard to

make out anything: the sun was rising just behind the figure, and in the intolerable dazzle it was merely a black stark silhouette against the fiery sky.

At least, it would hardly be a friendly figure, thus alone on the deserted heath. Speaking softly to the mare, she began to pick her way to the right, intending to skirt out of sight along the side of the hill, till she had left the dumb black menace far behind her.

She turned her eyes upon the rider at the crest. To her chagrin, she saw that he was letting his horse keep decorous step with hers. He was pacing solemnly down the crest to the right, parallel to her way—indeed, as her mare was insensibly aiming up a trifle, the paths would meet. She aimed farther down; the horseman did the same, keeping the same distance between them.

Best put a bold face upon the matter, and ride straight for the danger. The man's horse was probably fresher than her mare; it would do no good to try to escape. No sooner decided, than she pulled the rein sharply to the left, and aimed straight at the silent figure.

The man sat at ease on the crest, awaiting her arrival. "Halt! In the Queen's name!" he called out, a sharp staccato bark that set Bonnie to dancing nervously, hardly ten feet from his stand.

"I seek the Queen," the girl replied simply, drawing her mare to a standstill.

“A woman, by the red fiend! You do not seek my Queen, I venture.”

“Is there more than one?” Her eyes, dazzled by the light behind him, tried to make something out of his face, a blur of dark crimson.

“My Queen is Chance; I am her premier,” the man answered negligently, riding easily up toward her. She saw then that there were two pistols swinging from his saddle, and a sword jangling at his side. Suddenly she saw more, as he moved from the site of the sun toward the right: for a moment she almost cried out at the view of his face, stained red as if with blood. She held her nerves taut, and her face rigid. As breath came back to her, she saw, in a quick glance, that his eyes bored her features sharply—to see, of course, if his appearance had dismayed her. She could hardly hold her eyes away from his face: some horrid blotch of a birthmark, was it, or merely shammed blood, as innocent as the flush she rubbed on her own cheeks?

He was against her now and bowing ironically. “Why do I find a lady, evidently noble, riding alone through my own Veiled Heath?”

“I ride to London, to see my Queen and yours,” she answered straightly. “Will you point me the road, or lead me to it?”

“These are my roads; you have found them.”

“Halt! In the Queen’s name!” Her tone stabbed suddenly out, in a tense parody of his word. Her

firm right hand held a pistol, sighted for his breast. "Stop there, or I shoot!"

"Shoot, then," his voice was unperturbed. "The red devil guards his own."

"Halt, I say!"

He paid no heed; he was not three yards away from the head of her horse now.

"I—I——"

Still he came on.

There was nothing else to it. Half closing her eyes, she pulled the trigger. Pity, with so fine a man; but she was bound for London, and this was in the journey too.

A click: that was all.

Smiling slightly, he relieved her nerveless hand of the weapon, and took, besides, its mate in the other holster. "Water has its uses," he smiled agreeably. "I saw that your priming was wet. Why do you seek your Queen?"

Her breast rose and fell furiously. "One moment ago, and I would have shot you, and wept afterwards for the deed. Now that I cannot, I choke to do it!"

He looked her over at length: his schooled face said nothing. "I do not care to shoot you;" and then, bringing the accent back one small word, "I do not care to shoot you. Why do you seek your Queen?"

She breathed out once, a sharp, pettish sound. "What concern is it of yours? Because she's the

direct object of a verb; because the moon is made of sugared curds; because you're too damned inquisitive. Is that enough?"

"Why—do—you—seek—your—Queen?"

She laughed, mistress of herself at last. "Why, you ask? And why not?"

"Why not?" He laughed, a pleasant easy sound. "For a myriad weighty reasons. Why should anyone barter here for there, my lady? Why exchange this sweet kingdom of heath and hill, for four clipped walls and a lackey's crouch? Why sell the breath of the gorse and the fronded bracken for all the filthy mews and coigns of London? What are lath and plaster, to the moon and the sun and the dark's sky-vagrants? If you could live here with me," he studied her with his careless gaze, "would you willingly lower yourself into the city's cesspool?"

"If the winter nipped——"

"A roaring fire in a cleave in the rocks, or a hand-hewn hut in the forest—has the city better than these?"

"The dangers of the wild——"

He studied her, and nodded contentedly.

"Are there any dangers, I wonder, from without?"

She considered this, and was not satisfied. "But evil weather—storms—thunder and lightning and the drench of rain—the streams big with heaven and its pelting floods——"

“To wet the priming of my enemies,” he parried with a rich smile.

A pretty grimace granted defeat. “You love your very hardships.”

“There are compensations, you see,” and he bowed in stately style. “Today, you came.”

“Is banter with me worth that much?”

“Talk? No.” He was still matter-of-fact.

“I am an impoverished orphan; you will neither find gold on me, nor find one willing to dispoCKET a single sovereign, to keep my throat from being carved.”

“Not your gold,” he said simply.

She flushed gently this time. “Then you are not repaid at all, that’s clear. I go to London, Sir Heathen, to make my fortune at the Queen’s court.”

His eyes opened this time. “A—a woman?”

“God’s white mercy, does the whole world of men think a woman is nothing but a teasing pillow, a nursemaid, a scullery trollop, or a wanton? I go to ride my road, for that I am of the breed of man, no less and no more. I am woman, as you are man; but that is not the all of me. I am I—a person—a child of Adam and Eve, as surely as Cæsar was a person, and that great godly grouch, Cromwell, and Bloody Wynne—no more and no less.”

“You know my name, then.” He nodded in somber fashion.

“I guessed it, slowly. But I had not guessed

that your face was so brave with blood, like a Mexican idol, kneaded of grain with the blood of living hearts, and served a red oblation by priests blood-besmeared." A hint of bitter raillery crept to the surface of her tone.

"That's neither there nor here: I am I, and you — What you are not you will learn soon enough, my fine lady. Ay, part of that alphabet you'll know well, before you see the last of me." There was a sardonic note in this that he had not ventured before.

"I do not like your tone," as frostily direct as she could make it.

His eyes burned her without flinching. "Soon you will like it less."

"You grow impertinent. Will you guide me back to my road, and set me on my way to London? There are a couple of pence for you, my good fellow——"

The slur did not alter a muscle on his face; his eyes took possession of her with advertised insolence. "No," he said quietly.

"Then, what, in the name of all rude boors, do you expect to do to me? A brave knight of the road in truth you are, skulking away from any danger, and wreaking your peevishness in insults on unarmed women here in the midst of your thrice-blasted empire!"

"Your useless pistol," he returned it ceremoniously to her. "Now follow my horse." If he

had been speaking to a tuft of trampled grass, there could not have been more impersonal scorn in his voice.

“I will know where first.”

“Name of a dog,” he turned savagely on her, “you will follow me to a glade I hold sacred to the lists of lust, and there you will pay me the only toll a woman can. Is that enough?”

“You are as frank,” and her face went whiter, “as you are boorish. Oh!” a quick little cry, as her pistol spun from her hand, and fell half a dozen feet away. She had used all of her quick-witted skill in the apparently casual toss of the weapon; her face showed nothing but hurt contrition. “Shall I dismount and pick it up, or are you knight of the road enough to——”

He bowed at her pause, and swung lightly to the ground. Three swift strides brought him to the fallen glitter; he stooped gracefully to lift it.

At the moment, with all of her energy, she released the tight clench of her knees on Bonnie’s flanks, and spoke a sharp word to the mare. Two leaps brought her beside the outlaw’s horse. One grasp, and she had the reins of the strange horse in her hand.

“Farewell,” she called over her shoulder, “while London!”

She gave the word to Bonnie, and a cut of her whip to the other horse. Off the two galloped together—her practiced hand engineered the feat

prettily. She turned a gay face back for one look at the abandoned wanderer.

At his look, her face altered in amazement. There was no dejection in his bearing; rather, there was half proud amusement.

A flirt of her arm toward him, and she galloped on up the hill into the sunrise.

A swift, sharp whistle from behind her broke the calm. She had hardly time to shrug, when, with a quick snort that slued her half way round in her saddle, the strange horse drove his front hoofs into the turf, and snapped his head back. The reins burned through her hands; for all her strength, she could not hold them. The steed whirled round, and cantered briskly back toward the running highwayman.

It was a chase, then, she thought grimly. Bonnie was as good as the other horse for riding, and fairly fresh after this wait. Clinging low over the mare's neck, she whispered low encouragement into the sensitive ears pricked back toward her. The man would have to outride the very wind, to catch her!

She heard the muffled thud of the following hoofs now, and called on Bonnie for all that she could do. It was uphill; there was no road, but this damned neck-high brake and copsewood. The thudding from behind grew constantly louder.

She turned to the right, for a more level path, tending a bit downhill. Her mare crashed on

through the wildness; but the horseman below gained feet by turning at the same instant, and making toward crossing her way.

Well, if it had to be, it had to be.

“Stop, or I shoot your horse,” his brusque command struck her.

She was of a mind to risk it. But he was overtaking her anyway, and it was Chris’s—that is, Lieutenant Maynard’s horse. She curbed the panting mare, and stood frigid, staring away into the bright sunrise.

“Ride beside me,” he ordered curtly, walking his horse around hers and turning its head again toward the sunrisen crest.

This time she did as she was told. She spoke carefully, altering her scorn to a slow persuasion. “You ride well, Sir Highwayman. My trick on you was no worse than your joke to me,” and she smiled intimately.

He stared suave inquiry.

“About your love glade, you know,” she held level her pounding voice. “A quaint conceit! But you know, as well as I, that love is not won that way; and that love unwon is love unworn.”

Carefully he pondered this. “There is much I have not known, then. There is somewhat I have. I am not called Bloody Wynne for nothing.”

Again she fought to hold her voice even. “It pleases you to entertain me with these jokes, Sir Highwayman. I am not fooled; I know you earned

your dread name through deeds of bloody courage against men, and against odds. You do not prey on weak women!"

"Your tune glides the gamut," he agreed pleasantly. "A space agone, and you were anything but weak woman. As for me," he shook his head smilingly, "how well you have learned all to be known of me!"

"I go to London, to the Queen," she repeated quietly, to carry conviction by the very repetition. "Before long, I shall not be unknown or unheard to her ears. You will want a pardon, to wipe out whatever mischance outlawed you; so that you can roam your own hills, without knowing that every man's hand is armed against you. If you aid me in reaching my road to London, I shall prize the act at no low memory." She had guided her mare against his steed, and reached over with all the face of impulsiveness to grasp his arm. "I know that you will help me—for I need it!"

His hand tightened on the pistol on the farther side, she noted; then loosened its hold. "You do," he granted idly, and was silent.

"And you will aid me——?"

"This road comes in time to London," he confessed. There was a charm in playing cat to such a charming mouse—in giving her a run of satisfied belief that she had won something of her point, before the bloody paw struck her to earth.

She could hardly choke back the gasp of delight.

“I knew I had not judged you falsely, Sir Knight! You are leading me back, are you not?”

His face was as gentle as hers. “Do you think I could harm you?” he wondered aloud.

She was all jubilation within; and set out at once to be as entertaining as possible. Trust her to win her way, over any odds. And he, within, laughed to himself at the gullibility of woman. The last sin of Gilles de Rais, he reflected, had been to make his victims trust him fully, before blasting them.

His horse needed no guiding to the particular glade Wynne had in mind; the rider could turn all his attention to the sweet prattle at his ear, and the task, by no means easy, of retaining her confidence in him, without too obvious a lie. Soon his mind began to juggle his courteous repartee easily, and the deeper part of it ranged on to richer fare—to visions of what would occur, when the glade had been reached. All unaware of what heaved under the surface against her, Folly gossiped gaily ahead, of her childhood, of the queer Quaker home to which she had been transplanted, and of what she meant to do and be in London.

“It is hard for me to make a man see my aim,” she confessed with smiling candor. “Men are such—such selfish swine. Not you, of course—”

“Men have names for women, too,” he shook his head at man’s depravity.

“You are one man out of the raff,” she flattered broadly. “You saw at once what I was mounting toward. Isaac Scattergood, a benison on his pious obtuseness, was merely horrified—he saw the fiend speaking in me! This Lieutenant Maynard I told you of—he was no better, can you believe it?”

“It is extraordinary,” he assented casually. Then his eyes widened with a start, as they caught the treery gate to the glade. The bright eyes narrowed reflectively. Once within, and this honey cargo would learn much!

“Even Uncle Westport, broad-minded as he is, took the same atti——”

He started with visible suddenness, and turned in quick suspicion toward her. “Uncle *who?*”

“My uncle, the Earl of Westport. It was to his house I went, in Bristol, that last night; he is to present me at court. I told you before—maybe you were not noting——”

His horse stopped abruptly, at an unseen twitch of the reins. The outlaw stared frigidly at her face. “You are Stephen Westport’s niece?”

“And his ward, too. Of course, he’s rake and debauchee, in the eyes of the godly; but what an improvement he is on that old Quaker!”

A gentle gesture woke the horse again. “It’s a queer snarled world,” he spoke aloud, as if phrasing a regret all forgetful of the girl. “Speak to

your horse.” After a pause, “I wanted you to see this place, Mistress——”

“Folly—Folly Leigh.”

“Drunkards may not always snore in the arms of Providence, but this particular Folly surely does,” he continued his strange aloof musing aloud.

“You puzzle me a trifle.”

“It’s no great matter. I wanted you to see this glade, Mistress Folly. Here,” and his tone pared down to naked cold truth, “I have killed five men, and flattered more women than I dare count, by the gift of my attentions. Not always forced, either, may I assure you? You are entitled to add this to your memories, before we ride on to the London Road.”

“Yes,” she gasped, utterly puzzled by the sinister relief in the air. And again, “Yes. I see.”

“Come,” he said between his teeth. “It is not too nice a place, to me. Nor is it child’s sport to ride away from it with you—as you still are.”

CHAPTER VI

A LITTLE MORE BLOOD

AFTER they rode away from the soft face of the glade, Wynne spoke in apparent idleness out of his reverie. "Mistress Folly," and then he nodded, and continued, "did you know, when you spoke of Westport, that he and I are far from being strangers to one another?"

"Why—why, no. You see, I never heard him speak of you. I spent only one night, remember, in his manor in Bristol——"

"Stephen Westport," he spoke gently, "did me a good turn once. There had been first a private quarrel between two gentlemen, in which I happened to serve his wishes, all unknowing. Accordingly, he lifted me out of the most difficult scrape of my life. I do not forget. He was much, remember, under William, as well as everything under Anne. I have done him a dozen good turns since——"

"You really know him, then?"

A gay chuckle came from the red face. "I know no man living better, devil take me! Why he's with me on a hundred madcap turns! Whenever he gets underseas on his damned diplomacy, and sickens to death of the puling zanies around the court, he slips slyly out, sends me word, and

we roar our way together from Ramsgate to Blackpool! I would not darken Stephen in your eyes——”

“I have no nursemaid,” she nodded. “I know that my good uncle has mistresses from one end of England to the other—godly Isaac Scattergood explained that to me——”

“Ah, but what spirit, what mad brilliancy of imagination and execution! There were hot blades in the days of second Charles——”

“‘The old goat,’—wasn’t that Charlie’s love-name?”

“Mistress, I bow to you! So they did; and Rochester, Buckingham, and a whole stews of others rioted like emperors over the land. O, but we’ve gone them better, Stephen and I, time again and time again! What tales I could tell! My fair lady, for your ear alone—we didn’t stop at royalty itself! One dark night, we quarried off the Queen’s self—and turned her loose half a night later, and she never had the faintest dream that her Lord Great Chamberlain——”

“You do earn my curtsey!”

He chuckled again. “A good thing the court of heaven is out of reach, or we’d plant a bar sinister there. So, when you spoke his name, that altered all.”

Her sudden intake of breath woke him to an understanding of what she had not yet realized.

Her troubled face told more; "Altered?" she asked, not quite believing.

She was entitled to the truth, he adjudged. "You thought you were to scape scatheless, did you? On my name, if Westport had been in my place, and you my kinswoman, I couldn't answer for what might have happened!"

"But you mean—that if I hadn't mentioned him——"

"My dear Mistress Folly, this I may say: three young girls slit their throats in that very glade you have left, after I had done with 'em. Remember," he spoke quietly, "they call me Bloody Wynne."

The girl shivered, and soon led the talk into a sunnier channel. It was not flattering to think of herself, for all her self-esteem, riding unknowing under the red shadow of this chance stranger's power, and saved only by an accidental sesame. And what was not pleasant and flattering her urbane memory laid in the crypt marked forgetfulness.

Travelling over heath and hill with Wynne, she soon observed, was a far different matter from following the trodden way to London. He knew this country, as a man knows the paths in his garden: their horses, too, could go where no coach could pass without wings. Without losing time, he led her through forest runs and easy fords and great uncharted plains, until the troubled wild was

as smoothed as a walk from the gateway of the cathedral to the Mayor's Chapel.

Wynne, finding the girl thirsty for his knowledge of the woodland, named the hills as he passed them, and the less usual breed of trees and shrubs. He turned aside to show her a great troop of bustard feeding, almost a hundred of the huge creatures. A sudden shout, and he had sent the great wings beating southward toward the Channel. As they skirted one marsh, a queer cloud of cranes rose above them. Down one long oak glade—a rare sight, he explained, for the last score of years—a great wild bull with his white mane glared at them, then lumbered slowly off.

So absorbed was she in these sights, that it was with a shock of surprise that she raised her eyes to see a horseman skulking behind a gnarled trio of oaks, a hundred yards ahead. She steadied her voice: "Did you see him?"

His smile was ease itself. "From the hill we have left. There is one on each side of us, too. No flurry; I shall deal with them."

Her heart dancing at the certainty of power and protection, she rode ahead. Before they had reached the oaks, it came, from three sides at once: "Stand, and deliver!"

Wynne rode quietly ahead of the girl, his hat down over his eyes. Then he raised his face. "Really?" he inquired politely.

The highwayman barring their way dropped a

nerveless hand, his pistol dangling. "It's—it's the chief. All pardon——"

"It's no offense," smiled the girl's companion. "Better luck with the next stranger. And good day, men." With this courteous interchange, they rode on.

"You are utterly safe here?" she marvelled aloud.

"Why not? They are safe from me, remember."

But the woodland sights could not stretch forever. Long after noon they secured lunch at a huddling farm where Wynne was well known; and at night they rode up to an inn, where he seemed even more at home. As they were being served the best that the host could scrape together, Folly wondered aloud at his daring, with the Sheriff's men of every shire out after him.

"Little you know, my dear, of the customs in merrie England! Sheriff's men? I have enough of them fee'd to make an army—to give me word of wealthy merchants setting out, and Queen's men transporting gold. Mine host of this tavern is one of many who are cater-cousins of mine. Ugh, what worms they are! They'll mark the room where sleeps a throat to be cut, whose pockets are well lined with golden sovereigns. Not that I cut the throats; they have a lower gentry for that. But, scaping that, as soon as the party sets out on the morrow, I appear from the brush like a dog from

his kennel, and ‘Stand and deliver, in the Queen’s name!’ ”

Unconsciously he had raised his voice; the travellers in the room blanched, at the levelled command, and no less at the forbidding red face. Seeing that it was but sport, they bent again to their food, still shivering.

“It is not a bad life,” agreed Folly earnestly. “You almost tempt me to join with you. You must fare well—” her eyes travelled over him in sincere flattery.

“One has to keep up appearances,” continued Wynne thoughtfully. “Mark my attire, now; no man in the room is as well dressed as I. We are of necessity the gentlemen in the empire of thieves: the earls and dukes, shall I say? The coffee-houses know us, and the elegant salons of chance. We must know how to rub shoulders with men of quality, to lay a bet with the apt swagger, to cross swords with the best in the kingdom with the grace of a fencing-master. The nobility, in this ribald age, court us to take them along on our jaunts; Westport, who rides with me, need not court, God knows. Two score years ago, it was Duval——”

She quoted prettily:

“Here lies Duval. Reader, if male thou art,
Look to thy purse; if female, to thy heart.”

“Precisely. What with stepping the coranto with captured ladies of fashion on the heath, and setting the hearts of all the court beauties to burn-

ing, he gave us a high model to follow. When you decide to take up highwaying," he bowed with a stiff, friendly smile, "you will find your court manners almost smooth enough to fit you for our company."

"I shall remember, my friend. As for this night——"

"This inn; and, at dawn, the road again."

After the last night's chill ride, Folly tasted to the fullest the ease of the inn bed. She knew that she was safe, with her outlaw protector in the next room; and, if all the truth must be told, sighed a little that it was so. She did not wake until his cautious rap, still in the grayness, summoned her to breakfast. The mare, Bonnie, seemed no whit the worse for her steady task of the two days before; and they cantered off together in the cloudy dawn.

Before they had been two hours on the road, Wynne turned to the girl with a thoughtful look. "There is an interruption coming," he said soberly. "I do not know what it is—it will not work us great ill. I thought to mention it, however."

"You can read what is not yet?" She was fascinated at the constant fresh revelation of the man's many-sidedness.

"There is little art needed to read what is past," he threw off lightly. "I hold that what is to come waits somewhere, ready shaped: like the next inn, waiting for us to ride up to its hospitality, with

meal set and servants at attention. So with what is still to come. It has been always so with me; I am a woman in that," he confessed with almost a shyness.

"I am a man, in being shelled against foreknowledge," she countered. "We make an admirable team. Let us hope that your interruption——"

He reined in his horse, and cocked an ear back toward the road on which they had come. "No—I do not hear hoofs yet. Soon I shall——"

"My pistol is primed now," she offered softly. "We two can face off whatever comes——"

"It is one horseman," he spoke with certainty. "I hear him now. Hark!"

She listened, and at length made out the dull sound too.

He studied the situation carefully. They were in a level opening in the forest, a fit place for what strange encounter might come. He nodded in satisfaction. "This will do well."

Side by side they awaited the rider, whose coming had come so strangely first to Wynne. The sound grew sharper, still out of sight around the turn in the road.

Suddenly, at the end of the cleft in the woodlands, a horse's head appeared, galloping heavily. His rider, head lowered, was hardly a score of feet away when he raised his eyes, to discover the two standing so silently before him.

"Folly!"

“Chris—Chris Maynard!”

The Lieutenant stiffened in his saddle. “I have words for you,” he admonished sternly. His eyes turned to the outlaw beside her. “I do not know whom I have the honor of addressing——”

“My name is Wynne,” without boast or humility.

“I should have suspected it. Does this maiden accompany you with her will, or without it?”

“Ask the maid.”

“Of my own will, of course, Chris. Don’t be too dense. Will you join us?”

“Sir,” ignoring the girl, and speaking only to the highwayman, “this girl was placed under my keeping by her nearest kinsman. May I thank you for shielding her thoughtless journeying?”

“I am your humblest servant,” the outlaw bowed, with hardly a hint of mockery.

Maynard’s face grew hard. “I wish you a very good day, sir.”

Wynne laughed easily. “You are considerate: may the weather please you as well. In my turn, I shall speak more plainly. If you choose, Mistress Folly and her devoted escort will be delighted to have you ride with them to the gates of London.”

“This is an impertinence. You are, I assume, a highwayman——” Scorn blistered the tone.

“An unofficial thief and killer, yes; and you, in Her Majesty’s Service, are merely one who shares a sovereign’s official monopoly of killings.

You are not a statesman, I assume, so have not yet been admitted to the royal prerogative of thieving as well." Wynne's face still held an easy friendliness.

"This is damned impertinent!"

"Truth is always an impertinence, I believe, to diplomats and soldiers. Your tone, sire, was pertinent enough, but hardly flattering."

Chris stared at him speechlessly.

The outlaw grinned in easy good nature. "Make your choice: with us, or by yourself."

"The girl goes with me!"

"If she chooses." Wynne bowed courteously toward her.

"But, Chris," Folly kept her face inoffensively straight, "this gentleman has brought me thus far—there have been perils too, and you see—I am sure that the rest of the way——"

"Sir," his tones clicked more strongly, as he regained control of himself, "you are a scoundrel, that I can easily see. Your bloody record has already reached me——"

Wynne still smiled. "And yours is still to be made, Sir Soldier? Well, ride ahead alone, or behind alone, or with us: I care not a fiddle-string. The maid has spoken, and with me she goes."

"Not if my sword can let it!"

Wynne swung lightly to the ground, passing his rein to the girl. "I shall not whistle this time, my

friend," he smiled at her. Then to the man, "And this sword you prate of——?"

Maynard, scowling furiously, as he realized that so far he had not shone in the meeting, slid to the ground, and bared his blade. "I warn you, I shall run you through, sir, if I have the chance——"

"Which, the devil willing, you will not have. On guard, then!"

A gray glitter of steel, and the blades clashed. Maynard fenced well, that much his uncle had told her: but his best was little against the uncanny skill of the outlaw. Wynne's style, Folly noted—and she had first-hand knowledge—was by far the best: instead of the bent arm guard of Maynard, with the blade inclining upward, Wynne fought with his arm almost fully extended, and his smallsword in line with his forearm.

"Point!" called out the highwayman briskly, as he scored a deft touch.

"My sleeve," grunted the other.

Again, "Point!"

It was the cloth again; and Maynard, slowly furious, risked all on a direct lunge at the body. Wynne was utter ease in parrying it, and with a deft flick of his wrist sent the other's blade flying grayly through the air. Dropping his point, he stood at rest. "Is it enough? I could have run you through, you noticed."

"Be agreeable, Chris," urged Folly gently, "and ride on with us. This is no fledgling, but one of

the best blades in Europe that you face. I doubt if I—” she stopped, and smiled. “He wishes you no harm, I am sure——”

“But my uncle told me——”

“He might well have named me in your stead,” said Wynne civilly, “for Stephen Westport and I are friends. Will you ride with us, Sir?”

“I do not love solitary going,” and Chris bowed gracefully. “Lead on. The coach and Mistress Blick will follow in due time,” he explained to the girl.

“I hope you do not really mind, Chris——”

“At least,” he said resignedly, “we will reach London before His Lordship.”

CHAPTER VII

THE SALAMANDER WOMAN

AT sunup, on the first day of August, the three travellers set out upon the last hour's ride to the outskirts of London. Wynne turned to the girl, with his unfailing courtesy: "How did you lie, my lady?"

"Not well: the shutters creaked and whined, as if the world were dying."

"It was a high, evil wind. I pray God all is well with Stephen Westport on his journey. You know," he continued slowly, "a high wind blows from the death of a high soul, we say in my counties."

Folly smiled comfortably. "That wind was too gentle to point my esteemed uncle, never fear. When he passes, all the winds will be unloosed, and the yeasty waves driven high above Paul's."

He shook his head somberly. "It was an evil wind; I pray you always ride in a better."

Within an hour, the outlaw drew rein, and bade the others farewell. This was London; they could not go amiss now. And, indeed, within two hours the two of them drew up at the door of Westport Court. Folly rejoiced at one thing: not one word of reproach had come from the Lieutenant for

what was, after all, a rather daredevil escapade. Perhaps he was saving it for Westport's ears; well, she saw no reason to shrink from a conflict with any one. Her own weapons would serve her with king or pip.

Chris left her in the care of the steward's wife, while he walked out to see if any word had come from the host and his wife. Half an hour before noon he was back again; and Folly, who had spent much musing upon her toilet, was piqued to notice that he had no eyes for her fineries. His brow was heavily furrowed: could it be unpleasant news of his relatives? She could not wait in suspense.

"Any word, Chris?"

"About my uncle, no." He shook his head grimly. "But I have heavy news. The Queen is dead."

Her blue eyes opened limpidly. "That high wind had a word for us, then!" An impish and adorable impertinence tilted her face. "So Anne is gone? Mrs. Morley dead at last? And the German comes in?"

He came closer to her, drawn against his intention. "So it must be. George, son of the Electress Sophie, whose soul may Heaven rest, too, is to be our new sovereign."

Folly sat staring at him intently. "And I came to London to see the Queen, on the very day that she died! Heavens—should all my quests end like this! But no," she flashed dazzlingly aside, "I

came to let royalty see me—and there are always Kings and Queens, it seems. This new King, Chris—what is he like? Have you ever seen him?” She crossed over to his side, hanging on his arm, looking meltingly into his face. “Will he like me, Admiral Chris? Do you think he will like me?”

“The devil’s self would like you,” the troubled young man grumbled, “if you looked at him like that. I misdoubt that he—the German, not the devil—can fail to like you: he has had his wife in jail for twenty years——”

“Oho!”

“And his mistresses, men say, are the plainest molls on the continent. If you play your high-tighty tricks on him——”

“We shall see, bonny boy! Poor domestic Anne! How could a woman, who had buried five children in her youth, and looked for twice as many more who came ill——”

“Folly! How can you jest on such themes?”

“Pardon, grave and reverend seigneur. How could a woman of small wit and an insatiable tooth for food——”

“Have you no reverence at all?”

“Not a whit! What are kings and queens but you and me fallen under the unlucky glare of immense wealth and utter public scrutiny? I might be no wiser than Anne; but, God my witness, I would have made a lovelier queen——”

He stared savagely out of the window. "You would be queen of the world, if I had my way."

"Spoken like my own courtier! And you would make an admirable king, Chris—" She stopped teasingly.

"I?"

"—For a king, to be happy, must not be too brilliant—" she began, her face sober enough.

"You incorrigible jester! You will meet your mate in Uncle Westport——"

"While he arrives, you and I will see what we can of London, charming Chris? O, I'll behave very prettily: I'll say nothing about the Queen's tooth, much less her——"

"Folly, Folly!" He had intended no such thing: in truth, there were charges that he should be executing. But the girl, in this mood, was irresistible. For the next two days, she made him her constant squire about the capital, which was now solemn enough in its mourning gloom at the death of the sovereign.

On the third night, Westport and his wife arrived. Folly found herself shunted aside; the nobleman was closeted with Maynard for more than an hour. Folly feared that she was the subject of at least part of the conversation, and tingled a bit when they came out. But there was no reference, at its end, to the heterodox manner of her trip up to London. Perhaps Chris had shielded her—adorable escort! What it was that troubled

him was soon made clear: he was busily engaged in weaving his preliminary status under the new sovereign. He could hardly expect to remain as high as he had stood with the daughter of James; but, since the German policies were still to be shaped, anything was possible out of the fog.

For the next few days, the girl found herself very much neglected, while affairs of state went on, in preparation for the triumphal entry of the Hanoverian into his new land. She found the relief a grateful one: the countess, at least, did all she could to make the time pass pleasantly, and ciceroned the girl's lingering tour of inspection of historic Westport Court. And then, one morning, the atmosphere was singularly cleared: Westport and the Whigs, it appeared, had come to terms. It looked as if he would have at least an initial advantage with the new ruler.

That afternoon, he brusquely ordered the countess to pay a call of state quite overdue, and suggested with imperative casualness that she need not take Folly. The girl intercepted the look that went with this—a command, if there ever was one. Evidently she was to hear from His Lordship.

For an hour, after his wife had departed, he did not come to the girl. She concluded shrewdly that he wanted the atmosphere of the hour to grow upon her. And then, he sent word to her that he would see her in the Hall of Portraits.

Quietly she came down; for all her will, she

felt flushed and chilled in turn. She had come to recognize the look that men held in their eyes when they saw her: a look that unbared desire. It was no less in the godly old ascetic, Scattergood, who turned it into a tongue-lash of bitterness, than in the highwayman on the heath, and Chris at the White Bull. This same look had been on Westport's face, that night on the streets of Bristol; it had lurked not far away from his face ever since. Yet she could not ignore him, nor affront him: she must use him, with all her wit, to hasten the delayed efforts which must be made toward Will's return. It had come at last to the testing point. How could she hold him, at her own terms?

She hesitated outside the great hangings of the ancestral gallery: then she knew somehow that the moment would open the way. With the slow smile on her face that Cleopatra wore at Tarsus, when she welcomed Antony at her feet, Folly Leigh walked proudly before the nobleman.

He rose, eyes intent on her face, seeking to read what was written there. He read utter beauty, beauty that almost took his breath away, and instead held it within: beauty as cold and sure as a cave of ice lit by a simple torch. From his eyes came the look that brought the maids at court flocking around him. And so they met, her look and his: and the space between them hardened to a wall.

"Have you no kiss for your kinsman?" he dallied idly, planning with all his wit.

“Indeed, yes, dear uncle.”

But he did not take the offered cheek. Quietly his two hands came to rest on her shoulders, until he had her facing him. “The lips,” he ordered just as quietly.

She turned the full moon of her face upon him, and lifted her lips to his. His own came to them slowly, and, when they found the girl’s mouth a locked bud, kissed her as simply as she willed.

“You have not learned how to kiss?”

“Are there lessons, then?”

“Unless you discriminate against eager worth, in favor of humbler desire.”

Her blue eyes widened, until he felt he could see all within them: an eternity of cold frank blue. “You are the first man who has kissed me.”

“And you yourself have kissed——”

“No man living or dead, Stephen.” It was a shrewd touch, using his first name; if the tone was set by it, they were equals, and she had gained.

“May I show you how to kiss?” He choked a bit, so bright was the prospect before him.

“If it amuses you, surely.”

She listened with a blown smile to his explanation, and gave her lips as he directed. Yet he found no answering warmth; her lips, for all their letter following of his words, remained a bound bud.

“You are a queen among women,” he confessed

the easy platitude, a bit vexed with himself at finding the quarry so worthy.

“Should any woman be less? But of course; just as there are kings among men.” She bowed slightly. “Yet any woman who wills herself a queen——”

“Could you will your lips, girl, with all the sweetness of Hybla locked within them? Could you will cheeks like moss-rose petals, eyes like stars come to nest in flesh? Could you will a body as great as Phidias knew, when he dreamed his Venus out of chill stone?”

“If I were a dowd and a frowse and as plain as that fat dumpling who died in Windsor last week, I would be a queen still,” she smiled gently.

“By God, but you would! You—you care for me, Folly?”

“Immensely. More than that,” she carried the warfare over to him, “I need you. I needed you, before we left Bristol, to aid me be what I will be: more now, I need you for Will’s sake.”

“You can have me,” his voice throbbed in spite of himself, “utterly your own, if you will.”

“Would any refuse?” she fenced.

“Will you let me love you?”

“Will I be your mistress, you mean? That’s harder to say. I would have been your first miss, gladly,” she looked at him with level eyes. “I might have held you, you see. And no one can pick herself as your Shulamite; you will love till

you die, I think. And why be one lost in a procession?"

"You must let me love you!" Fooling himself into holding the wish to be utterly more, he came close to her, and caught her shoulders gently, pressing her body against his. She stood as straight as a youth, or as a tree leaned against by a passing drunkard; he felt the swooning ache of holding her bosom against his own, an ache that dulled, as he found no answering spark.

At length he released her as gently. "You felt no answering thrill?"

"Not a tremor, Stephen. Men love from the lips; women, from the heart of hearts. You have read your Addison?"

"—A harsh Puritan, for all his grace."

"Oh, you think of what he said of men of fashion, a sort of vermin who populate London with bastards. Believe my word, Stephen, I hold against him in that, especially as it touches you; and other men I judge by you. But I had something else in mind—his picture of me."

"Of you, my dear?"

She pursed her lips adorably. "He spoke of women who are salamanders—heroines in chastity, who tread upon fire, and walk on the flames without being scorched. Let me grant that I do not yet take strangers to my confidence at first sight, or receive men at my bedside. Yet I am as daring with my lips, and cautious with my body, as

the sisterhood he has in mind. When I give myself, it will be in my own time, at my own terms——”

“I ask but to know them, and to fulfil them.”

“But what if I do not see them clearly yet? I shall see your new keeper——”

A moment's start on his part; then he half smiled.

“—But I do not think George of Hanover is the man you are, Stephen; and I know that I am ice still. Kiss me when you must, if it amuses you——”

His hand caught hotly at her arm. She stared at him, until he lowered it, and his eyes too.

“I don't know, my dear; you see, I am sure. Let me meet the world of men first; for I tell you that I will cull what I want out of life, for all your scoffing.”

“I have other women,” he almost groaned aloud, “but I'll put 'em all by——”

“And find yourself easeless and abandoned, dear my lord? No; love where you will; and, for this while, be my friend—for God knows I need one!”

He turned from her, and stared fixedly at a great dark blankness in oils against the wall. When he fronted her again, there was more of the wall in his face. “I didn't think there was a woman walked could talk to me as you have done, Folly; somehow, by God, you talk me dumb. No,” he spoke still more firmly, “I won't wait your time,

my dear; you'll melt in my time soon enough. Keep your lips till you have more for me; and that'll be soon enough, I wager. You're worth a fortnight, shall I say?" He smiled agreeably. "For this while, then, say your will to me."

"Ah, but you know it, Stephen: in good season to meet his new majesty, and see to it that the seas are scoured for that scoundrel Teach, and to recover Will."

"That's little enough; as soon as I will, the chance that you wish for shall be yours."

Impulsively she held to his arm. "I can't thank you enough——"

"But what," lazy, half-closed eyes measured her, "if I do not will, my dear, till you will what I would have? What if I delay——"

"You wouldn't be such a swine!"

"Ah, my dear, when a woman's to be gained— But think it over well. And now I must leave you; I must be at Will's for a word with Townshend. While then——"

She hid her bewilderment with a baffling curtsey. "My kinsman's love to your lordship." He left her, feeling subtly rewarded and deeply held.

For the next few days, Westport was busied with preparations for the arrival of the Hanoverian, which furnished Folly a pleasant respite. At last came the eve of the great day. In honor of the forthcoming celebration, the dinner at Westport Court was more elaborate than usual. There

was a deal of people that Folly knew—Chris Maynard, Viscount Innis of Inniscourt, Sir Howard Batten, and more; she was presented to many of the leading notables of the Whig party—Viscount Townshend, smart Colonel Pett, Earl Stanhope, and others who were less than names to her.

The dinner was a bewildering succession of heavy dishes; after the first few, she could hardly taste the others. There was a great platter of fried marrow; a fricassee of rabbits and pigeons, a side of mutton, roasted whole; three loins of veal; an imposing stew of carps and salmon jowls; an immense dish containing a dozen pullets and four dozen larks baked together; a platter holding a dozen lobsters; a pie made of neats' tongues garnished with tansy and anchovies; another of lampreys; there were prawns, cheese, tarts, pastries, wines, cakes, and endless lesser dishes. Folly quoted aside to Chris, to his dismay, the sweet rhyme harking back to King William's time:

“King William thinks all,
Queen Mary talks all,
Prince George drinks all,
And Princess Anne eats all.”

All of them dead now, she reflected, though the rhyme was less than a score of years old: and Anne, who would have fallen to the dinner until she sweated prawns and lampreys, gone last of all. Kings and queens had stomachs, and diseases, and

were fare for the earth, as surely as commoners: and Folly felt herself a queen. Well, it behooved her to learn from queens dead and crumbled, that she might lengthen and brighten her day and night at the world's tavern.

Westport, the next morning, showed the effects of the food no less than the drinking; and breakfasted grumpily on radishes.

"Today the damned Dutchman comes," he groaned aloud, "and I with a head like a swollen cask! You'll have to ride with me, Helen," he addressed the countess. "As for Folly here, Chris can squire her—unless she's wise enough rather to spend the day decently at home. If I could avoid the raffish bedlam! The rabble will be all loose, howling their throats dry—though most of 'em would howl for Konigsmark as soon as for his stag."

Folly looked up with heightened color. "I am with child to see any strange thing, Uncle Westport! Pray let Chris take me——"

"God's mercy it should be twins, with this dumb alien glowering into London, at the head of his dour kinsmen and pitted women. But have it your way; and God give us speedy rest of coronations and sterile queens."

Lady Westport rose, never quite at ease at her husband's plain speech. Folly stood beside Chris, as the nobleman and his wife entered their coach of state, all blue velvet covered with gold lace,

drawn by six prancing barbs, and attended by twenty pages rich in russet and azure. It looked as if royalty were leaving Westport Court; the street gamins cheered as if the King's self were being driven ruthlessly through their packed midst.

Chris and Folly took the simpler coach, and were driven to Thames Street, near White Hall Bridge. As they threaded their way through the squirming aisle made by four stout militiamen, the guns of the fleet were booming salvo after salvo of salutes for the royal barge, as yet invisible on the river. They mounted to the highest scaffold, where seats had been reserved for them. Chris left at once to reconnoiter for news of the exact stage in the proceedings, which gave Folly ample chance to spy around. Below her were packed very thousands of the scum of London alleys and lanes; only the scaffolds held silks and velvets, black patches and swords of state. She could see no river, so thick were the boats and barges clustered. Yet down the stream there was a rumbling thunder of cheers, whose contagion spread momentarily toward her. They must be coming!

Chris came back, his face grave. "We will see all, Folly; but God be thanked we are high here, and not one with the vermin that crawl under us on all sides. These are horrid creatures spet from the lowest stews and dives of the city; there is pollution in their very touch, and hatred of nobility

in their every thought. They are wild dogs, cowed only by the pikes of the militia. Truly God made two orders of men, the nobles and the nothings; and there is naught, after all, beneath us.”

“Yet even the noble, a half dozen generations back, sprang usually from the miry rabble; and among those beneath us are byblows of dukes and earls long gone.”

“I cannot think——”

A roar from beneath and around them drowned the rest of his words; and then the great guns across the river opened their throats, and bel-
lowed their hot thunder in welcome to the new monarch.

“George!” “King George!” “God bless King George!” was the burden of the frenzied howls below and around them.

Folly, looking with interest upon the throbbing low life surrounding her, saw many a strange, sudden drama. Here was a man who screamed out a cry for James’s son. Like wolves on a bayed stag, the huddle around him fell upon him, smothered him, overwhelmed him. She saw the militia dragging out a broken thing in rags, and turned away with a shudder.

Here, in front, were half a dozen stalwart republicans, crying the Commonwealth. Their bold looks and stout blows overawed the raffish horde, and none durst near them.

“—bless King George! King George!”

The shouting and idiotic joy were beyond description. Yet so, she thought, man hails any change—sweet commentary on his usual lot.

At last she had a glimpse of the regal barge, brave in its silken banners. She stood on her feet for a confused vision of the landing, with fervid thousands kneeling in abasement to this mean German prince, as he stepped on England's lordly soil for the first time. Horsemen, citizens, noblemen, rabble, all on their knees. The Mayor kneeling, and extending toward the King the staff of his office, in token of fealty. The staff pressed back into the man's hands, with some unintelligible mutter in German, with suave translation from the English notable at his elbow. Why, it was that very Stanhope who had been at dinner last evening! She had a close view for a second of George's heavy face, blinking boredom at the tumult. What was the Mayor doing? He was handing over to the new sovereign an immense book, as large as the platter of baked marrow—a volume bound in white vellum, with a cross of purple and gold. The King was clucking something again; again Stanhope was speaking, with a faint smile on his face. The royal head passed under the golden canopy at the head of the steps. There was a cheering interruption, while the King was unseen.

Folly had a dazed sense that the world was shaking. She heard a queer straining sound, as if the foundations of eternity were giving. She

looked, startled, at Chris; his rapt face was all for the royal scene; he had noticed nothing.

Her eyes followed his toward the regal canopy: there was a great gold and white coach coming out from under its rich shelter.

Good God, thought Folly, those two things in dark crimson who had walked right behind His Majesty must have been the two German mistresses!

The crackling noise was plainer now; the scaffold lurched and quivered in the air. A scream to the right—and Folly saw at once what had caused the dreadful insecurity. The crowded scaffold next to her was settling, buckling beneath, upon the packed hundreds below it. A screaming from all sides: nobles, noblewomen, children, fighting for very life to press out of the sinking platform upon its insecure neighbors. One great tall soldier, with ribbons of honor upon his breast, was breasting his way, hurling men and women to right and left behind him, and hurling himself to safety. Others no less sacrificing: the sight shocked her out of her calm. She turned away.

A different scream now—a scream of pain, from beneath the jerry-building. Prettily trapped, good men and women and children of London! So royalty and nobility press down on you, Folly thought at mutinous speed. Shout for your King now to aid you, as the heavy beams poise above you for a moment's respite. You cannot move an

inch in the horrid, tense press: you can only pray to your—— Ah, there it is——crash! And the whole scaffold has tumbled down, scrambling nobility and gentility with the very dregs of the populace.

A cloud of dust spurting up, like smoke. Shouts of the militia, as they toss men, women, children left and right, to make a path to the scene of the disaster. Chris, standing pale and contained, his one thought for Folly. Women in hysterics; helping hands pulling men, children, women to safety on this scaffold, which sways a bit uncertainly in the troubled air. Will they all crumble together? The scaffold beyond is quivering. Cries of pain from below, wild, insistent.

And then, Folly saw a little child, a thing in utter rags, pressed against the ground by a beam that had fallen outward. Somehow the press has washed to the side, and even toward the river, where many clambered onto the moored boats; there was a dozen clear feet around the place where the child was caught. The child did not scream; her great, dumb, pleading eyes were raised to her heaven, and caught Folly's wide eyes there.

"I'm going," she gasped aloud, from an order far deeper than words.

"You're——what?"

"——To help her."

"It's madness—— You can't——" Chris placed a

restraining clench on her arm; his eyes burned in startling fright into hers.

With one wild shake of her arm, she threw off his grasp, and lowered herself over the side of the scaffold. It was cross-latticed, thank God; her feet sought a place to hold; then one swung loose for a lower support.

Chris was on his knees, his face close to hers. "In God's name, Folly, have reason!"

The threatening growl of the injured crowd below enveloped them like a net.

"They are beasts—they will tear you in pieces! In your velvet gown——"

Her head was gone from before his sight; she swung lower and lower. Her searching foot found no further support now. Clinging with her arms, she looked down; a good five feet to the ground. Closing her eyes, she threw herself outward.

A moment later, and she had run to where the child was pinioned. Men stood around, staring stupidly at the sight, too panicky to move.

"Lift that weight, there!" She spoke through clenched teeth.

No one moved to obey here. She put her own arms around it, and strained, strained. It cut cruelly into her shoulder; she could barely move it. The poor child sobbed once as the pain shifted. Folly thought that her back would break.

Then one among the men saw the thing, and placed his shoulder under the beam. It tumbled

off to the side, throwing Folly to her knees at the sudden release.

On her knees, in the dirt, she crawled over to where the little girl lay motionless. She took the child's head in her lap. The closed eyes opened, a look of dreadful pain. There was blood on the babe's rags.

With all her self-command, Folly shut her eyes to the horror, stroked away the tangle of dirty curls from the girl's forehead, and murmured broken endearments to her. By now the militia had broken through to the spot. A few deferential words, and they lifted the little burden, and took it away to be carried into the nearest hospital. Folly, still dazed, was aided to her feet; her eyes closed, everything swayed blackly around her. She hardly sensed Chris's arm supporting her to the coach: she was almost fainting, as he managed her in.

"That was utter folly," he told her gravely, when they were almost back to the palace. "I do not know what Uncle Westport will say——"

"And folly is my way, thank all the gods! If it takes folly to aid those in need, then may I walk in folly, till I walk no more!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SLENDER MOHOCK

MAYNARD came upon Folly after dinner, and by some wordless agreement they passed together down the long hallways of the palace, to the North Wing. Here he took the lead, and turned up a curve of stately stairs that led to a fretted door set into the outer wall. Chris threw the lock, and stood aside for the girl to pass through.

She stepped out of patterned London into a faerie world. The lofty portico on which she stood was gauded like a corner of Granada or more alien Bagdad. Grotesque pillars writhed up in alabaster from the murky floor to left and right, with fay arabesque plants in huge squat pots, all washed with unearthly colors in the dusk glimmer. Her eyes lifted to the end of the way. There, framed in an opening vaguely circular, yet fretted with embroidered loops and convolutions at its edge, was the world of the heavens. Against a strange sky of purplish blue, with a red pit-glare at the horizon, faint stars shivered above tall lace-like spires and one low bulbous dome. As she gazed, one star, the brightest, a smouldering emerald, came to rest on the slender tip of the tallest

spire, and burned there like an eternal beacon which God had set in the socket of his earthly tabernacle.

The witching mystery drew her feet forward toward the far glimpse of the drowsing city, and the farther sky. "It is not London," she said softly. "It is Samarcand, or Cathay, or some wilder scene east of the heart and west of the soul—but never, never Bristol-on-Thames. Look, Chris, at the few faint lights far below us—eyes out of the huge darkness. A few houses—yes, and there are moving links down that way—and, if you listen, a fainter clamor, smoothed and almost smothered by our mountain isolation above it all. A marvelous nook, this, floating in the serene ether high above man's low grovelling and tunnelling."

"I wanted you to see it. Folly," he stared moodily off at the farthest star, "you were right today, and I was wrong. You should have gone down into that cursed mob, and given yourself if need be for the rag-tag brat."

"I know it was——"

"And I will tell you why," he continued, eyes still on their voyaging. "You are more than a sun kissing a drift of autumn leaves; and the sun does not cloak his light. I am too small to sacrifice, I think; being so little, I am not great enough to give myself for another minim. But the great of earth have not stinted, when need arose. A

greater than all chose the tree and the torture, for lesser ones he loved.”

“Nonsense, Chris. The chit needed aid, and there was none but me to give it. No—it was not even that; I may as well be honest. At another moment I might not have lifted my finger. The mood was in me, and you know that I read my gospel there—to do still as I will.”

He gestured imperatively out toward the wavering splendor of the night, which had deepened until all was hid below but a few faint smears of after-glow along the horizon, and, above, the brightening stars. “In this pervading beauty, how can you set your whim so high—or yourself so low?” His tone was deeply serious; it rang in her ears like the deep tones of a bell.

“When I give the reins to myself,” she thought aloud, “I must confess that I shut the door to the heavens and the trim wonder of earth. But who of us do not, Chris? If I did at this moment what I wished——”

“Yes?”

“—I would do what I cannot: be no more, except as part of something vaster and lovelier than I. I would float out into the starry wideness, all of me gone to glow in the bright stars. No more Folly Leigh, in all her littleness; only the immensity of the heavens. But that will come soon enough; death may be no more than such an outward sailing. Now, with that door closed, my wish

is simpler: to ride on forever up the sunrise hill of the world; leading the spring within me to the winter without."

"If I did at this moment what I wished——"
And then he was oddly silent.

She read it, before it budded on his lips. "It would be——"

"You have given me no leave to speak," his voice was like great music. "But my heart speaks within me, and here, against the sky, you can not be too offended at me."

"You—you would——" she prompted.

"I—I——" he looked away. "I would hold you back," he ended lamely.

"Hold me back?" in real bewilderment.

Then he turned, and kept silent no longer. "When you sought to dissolve into air, or ride alone over the rim of the earth. Dear Folly, it should be with me you ride; for, from the moment I saw you first, I have known that no other woman can enter my heart."

"'Tis little enough time," she bantered lightly, to break the spell of his appeal.

"When one sees heaven the first time——"

"Ah, Chris, how like a man you are!" she bantered in pretty wickedness. "Willing to ride over the rim of the earth with me, you say, but quite unwilling, not so long ago, to ride over the heath with me from the White Bull."

“Oh, remind me of my failings—I earn it. My one palliation is that I love you.”

“But what a word love has grown, since the Stuarts rode back to Angel-land! What is love? Men want my body——”

Chris Maynard would not take his eyes from her own. “Do they want your soul as well?”

“—A dancing swamplight—a will-o'-the-wisp blown through the dusk——”

“A star as steadfast as that beacon shining long after its earthly spire has gone with the day.”

Folly's laugh tinkled softly. “You are no soldier, Chris, but a poet—like your own great namesake, slain for love, was it not? Or are all of your name great in love?”

“Folly——”

She would not let go. “I would not have you slain for me, Chris——”

“You cannot mean——”

Her tone veered like a sail flapping; she was sober all at once. “I mean nothing, dear Chris; I do not know my own heart, save that it is young still, and—and like the wind still. You earn a better answer; but I can not give it.”

“At least, I can hope——”

“Be my friend, and my squire, and my knight now, Chris; let the rest flower at its will.”

With this he was content; and together they turned for the descent. As they walked through

the glimmering stone monsters on the portico, Folly slipped her hand, friendly-wise, into his; he could not speak, and he knew that his heart was beating, beating.

When they at length came down to the great hall, Westport was pacing uneasily back and forth upon the thick carpet. He gave Folly one look, which Maynard missed. She saw at once all that was in his mind, of what had occurred since she left him.

“I wondered where in the world you two young cuddlers had vanished to,” he chuckled broadly. “It is midnight soon. Bid Folly your adieux, Chris; I must talk with her about her plans in London.”

The younger man bowed deferentially, blind to all but the surface of the situation. Folly made her curtsey last longer than usual, and watched his grave smile as he turned and left the two of them alone.

“Come, my light-o’-love,” the nobleman caught her by the arm, and led her into a far embrasure of the library. “You cannot but be at loving at all hours, bless us! In dark niches with young Chris for four mortal hours—and I pining to death for the touch of you!”

“We looked at the city from the porch high above,” she temporized. She put on a face of petty guilt, and smiled inwardly as she realized it; then perversely accentuated the effect.

“If I thought that was all the lad had done, he would sink inestimably in my opinion. What’s a

pretty woman for, damme, if not to be hugged and bussed in dark corners? Isn't that so, sweet cousin?"

"You are older than I," she lowered demure eyes, "and should know."

"A pox on your eternal laughing at me, Folly!" He aimed a clumsy arm at her waist; to find her, with an indescribable movement of grace, slipped aside, the dancing mockery still in her eyes.

"Why won't you take me seriously?" he grumbled.

"Must you qualify the query?" she teased.

"Damme, no! Will you take me?"

"Let me remember, now: I mustn't look a gift in the mouth——"

"Your wit parries like steel."

"I use steel, too," she smiled. "You should see me with the foils, Stephen. I've taken on crack swordsmen——"

"My dear girl," he was the benevolent patron all at once, "that's not for a woman."

"Oho! What do you call me, then?"

"'Forward girls make backward men,' " he quoted with unction.

"Are you so backward, Stephen?"

He smiled cynically. "With games like that, you bid fair to lose your reputation—and gain one you would not choose."

"My dear uncle, what would you have me do?"

"'Beware of Papishes, and learn to knit,' " he

quoted sardonically. Then his tone altered, as he came closer. "To love me, Folly."

All the time, she had been aware that he had been closing awkwardly in on her, planning a repetition of his aborted embrace. A light danced in her eyes; and then she lidded them carefully.

"Now, Folly——"

He might think I were a mare, she thought to herself, that he must cure of restive prancing.

"Yes, uncle?"

More deftly now his arm made for her waist: to his amazement, she made no effort to escape. He held her close, and placed two or three dazed kisses on her cheek. She stood as stiff and unmoved as a wooden statue.

"My God, girl, you're not human! Cannot you ever unbend a trifle?"

"I thought you wanted to kiss me, uncle."

"Not a whit. I wanted you to kiss me."

"When Will was in his cradle, he used to weep nightly for the great round moon," she bantered casually.

"Here's one man will clip the moon, my lady. You will do what I say——"

"How well you read the future!"

"—For I stand high in the grace of His Majesty, so far at least; and you are not averse to being presented——"

"Well, you vile pig!" Her gay laugh took

away all the sting. "So you're going to sell your favors——"

"I'm going to bring you crawling to my knees, and then lift you into my arms," he conciliated his hunger with his grand gesture of achievement.

"Heavens, what is in store for me! But, good nunkie," and she nestled against him, patting his cheek, "you know you won't put a price on what I want most, and must have——"

"And what I want most, and must have——" he parroted.

"We always get what we want most, if we have any mettle, and will pay the price," she assured him cryptically. "When will you present me at Court?"

"When will you accept me?"

"Shall I say that after you have proved your esteem by granting me access to His Majesty, that——"

"It's a bargain!"

"But let me finish. . . . —That I will give serious consideration to your humble petition——"

"Humble feather-dusters!"

"—And make you an answer that will not wholly deject you?"

"Girl, you have a shrewd head above your lovely body. We will see, we will see. We'll have little name left, if we loll and lip around thus late——"

“Come, Stephen, run away to bed now; I must protect your name,” she urged solicitously. Grumbling threats at her delay, he left her at last.

This was only the first of many such assaults; and she found the nobleman an annoyingly persistent suitor. There was a hint of delicacy in his technique, she adjudged; but it was soon obvious that she parried once and struck twice, to every blow that he essayed to land. If this was the timber of the court, she would have small room to fear.

But his persistence continued, despite her defense. The matter of a presentation was continually postponed, on grounds that sounded reasonable; and she began to see that his policy was one of attrition, to wear down her resistance, and achieve his goal, before he granted what she wished. Meanwhile, there was her duty to Will. . . . It would be unthinkable to mention the matter to Chris; he would fly into a smouldering rage, and like as not break finally with his relative and protector; which would be the worst thing in the world for the lad’s future. Who could she call upon, to aid her in restraining the buzzing nobleman? Or at least in stinging him in some way? For her crafty game must continue, until she reached the royal ear.

She was still mulling over the problem, when Westport asked her to return to Viscount Innis a dainty folio of *The Rape of the Lock*, which he

had borrowed from that social elegant. She wondered, as she was driven over by St. James's Park, whether Innis would aid her. She could at least sound him out upon it.

He sent word for her to come up, although his man said that he was suffering from a slight rheum.

As she entered, he turned a pain-drawn face up at her, and laid down softly the volume he was reading. "I can never peruse Mr. Addison's 'Cato,'" he explained, "without tears for that unhappy hero's fate." From his wadded taffeta dressing-gown, a beribboned garment of palest spring green, he plucked out a worked handkerchief, to dab away the damp tribute of a tear.

"It moves you so?" marvelled Folly, a bit overcome by the perfumed elegance of the room.

"But I am sensitive," he explained, as if that one word unlocked the whole explanation.

"Mr. Addison, to me," she ventured uncertainly, "is so painfully correct, that he has a marked case of ingrowing rectitude."

"Alack, Mistress Folly, but you grieve me to the heart!" Daintily he flirted the handkerchief hand, and laid it, cambric and all, against that part of the padding which his layman's mind assumed covered his heart. "You, I know, can participate in the delicate emotion I feel—the borrowed grief for that tragic lord!"

She shrugged easily. "I hold his talk either

drivel or fustian: poetic shoddy. And the tiresome Roman surely is a masque, rather than a man."

"Ah, Mistress Folly, you are too young, too untouched by the rude blast of man's adversity, to share the poignancy of that great soul's lucubrations." He heaved a tender sigh, and whisked at his eye again. "I weep for him; I weep for his monumental fall, in a world of noisome ignorance."

A spirit of perversity made her argue the point. "But he was the most inflated fool in all Rome, Eddie; a——"

A slight spasm crossed his face at her colloquialism. "Edwin, my lady dear; the vulgar term always pains me."

"You didn't use to be so twitchy about your name, when we romped together," she flashed.

He shrugged—a gesture that languished daintily away. "Ah, my dear, but I have learned much since I came to Court. All the young men of quality have become sensitive, in this harsh and bickering age."

"It is about Court that I came to see you," she seized the verbal straw eagerly. "Can you present me to His German Majesty?"

"Fie, fie, girl, how the burrs tumble from your tongue! Of course I could present you; with your Uncle Westport, I dare say?"

"There's the trouble, Eddie—I crave your

humble pardon, my treasured lord: Edwin. Stephen's a bit mulish——”

“Folly, Folly, where did such speech breed? It irks me to my tender soul to have your delicate lips seared with such raffish words.”

“They're damned good words, Eddie Innis, make no mistake.”

“I grow faint, Mistress Folly,” he sighed affectedly, reaching for his phial of *eau de cologne*. “My humor is very sensitive today; this rheum, alas, has made me more delicate than usual.” Again the flimsy handkerchief was called into play.

The servant appeared, to announce that Colonel Pett desired an audience. Folly rose to depart.

“Prithee, sweet maid, stay by me; for this raucous blade jars terribly upon me. Heaven knows what ill zephyr wafts him hither.”

“Hi lo, my lordling!” called out the jovial voice of the colonel, as he ascended the hall stair. He was a bit abashed to find a lady in audience, and bowed profoundly, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

“Good morrow, good sir,” said Innis, doing his best to hide the distaste upon his features.

“Invalided, ha? A good nogg of whiskey, and you'd knock the rheum galley-west.”

“I fear not; my frame, alas, is peculiarly susceptible to drafts and fevers.”

“I came to bid you to a cockfight tonight; but——”

“My dear Colonel Pett, on no account could I subject my person to that gross and sanguine sport. My nerves could never bear it! I’d faint flat away, God’s my life!”

“Well, you phrased the wish, sir, that we could take in some of the amusements of London together——”

“I thought, a visit to one of the more elegant coffee-houses, or a salon of one of the soberer matrons——”

“And you call those amusements! When you’re recovered, my lord, I trust you will not overexert yourself: I fear it would be fatal to confront aught but cambric tea. Good day, my lady—your face makes any day fair.”

She spoke slowly, having thought quickly. “I am leaving too, Colonel. Will you see me to my coach?”

“Ay, or anywhere you name.”

“Good day, my lord,” she gave him her most mocking curtsy. “I trust that your rheum lighten.”

“I pray so,” mourned Innis disconsolately.

Folly descended the stairs, her mind made up. At the coach, she held Pett in conversation at the window. “May I take you to your destination?”

“It is next door, ungrateful gallant that I am, and I am stayed for now. Otherwise,” he leered openly, “I would lie like a Frencher, and have

you ride me over half London, merely to sit by you."

Folly's face brightened. What if she should earn a world of rebuking looks, for holding the man in talk at her coach window? This was too good a chance to lose.

"What do you think of my Uncle Westport?" she asked directly.

"A damned good bully, in many ways. But he treads on my toes, with his persistent elegance and his perpetual chasing of reluctant women," Pett answered her, with uncanny shrewdness, watching her face all the while.

"And I live in his house," said Folly, admitting much as yet unsaid.

Pett bowed in understanding.

"Shall I call him out, my lady? And will you be the spoils of war? I'd run little Hanover through for less."

"Too fast, too fast," she smiled tolerantly. "He is my protector, after all. Perhaps some milder cure. . . . If you had a few friends you could trust——"

"I am wise enough to have more friends than lovers, and foolish enough to have more friends than gold pieces."

"Gifted enough, I should put it, in this age of sale. But that's good. . . . Let me see—— Where will you see him next? Does he go by any chance to this cockfight——"

“Westport? Damme, he haunts the pit like the ghosts of roosters slain.”

“Better yet.” Her color heightened. “May I go?”

His face broke into consternation. “What are you asking! Women are unthinkable at such places.”

“Need I be a woman, for this night only?” her slanting eyes tempted him.

“Hmm—— I did not tell the half to that be-ribboned puppy, with his damned *eau de cologne* and other stink water. I am not bid to the fight—I go an uninvited guest, and there may be knocks and heads broken.”

“But how——”

He studied her face carefully. “You can hold your lovely tongue?” He hummed something under his breath. “You know the tune?”

“Not I——”

“‘Then a Mohock, a Mohock I’ll be’—you’ve heard of the Mohocks, surely?”

“Who has not? Haven’t you broke more windows than the great storm?”

“I? Hmm—well, no man of my standing, of course, could belong; but in confidence, to you, I may say—— You see? We’ll bully and beat our way in, if need be, and crack a few heads in the process.”

“Including—Westport’s?”

“My dearest lady, that is a steed of a different hue. He is, after all, great in the kingdom. Yet

some of his pranks—— And why not, if there were a real reason? We'd trounce the Pope himself, or the Sultan Suleiman, if a woman bade. Yes, it might be done."

"And I go?" Her blue eyes caught him.

"But—a girl——"

"I am slim for a maid, Colonel——"

"Shall I look shocked?"

"You will behave, instead. And tonight, I will be a boy. Have I your yes on it?"

"By God, but you have wit and mettle!" He eyed her with appraising approval. "You shall go, as my page, or what not, and in reality my captain. I'm master cooper of the Mohocks——"

"Cooper?"

"I barrel up the old women, to roll 'em down hill. As for that damned privy councillor, we'll scalp him, if you give the word, or truss him up, roll him down Ludgate Hill, or——"

"While then, I shall study out just what should be done to him. I shall meet you where, and when?"

The details all fixed, Folly watched him stride away, warmed at heart for the first time in days. She had an ally, now; one who might become dangerous, as Wynne might have; but one who would do her bidding, if she kept her head level and her wits untarnished. As for Westport, it might do no good, but it would certes do no harm, to give him a brief unease. He had earned this, and far more!

CHAPTER IX

A TRIP DOWN THE HILL

EVEN with Hannah's loyal aid, Folly needed all her ingenuity to secure the page's costume, dress in it after dinner, and slip away unnoticed from the palace; but what she needed she found somehow.

Pett, all eagerness for her approach, slid back his door at her faint tap, and let her into his room. "By Gad, you're the spit of a boy! Give us a buss, my bonny!" making to take it without more ado.

Folly rattled her short sword warningly. "Fie, Colonel, would you kiss a boy? Keep back, sirrah, or I draw!"

"I'll bet you never held a foil in your hand!"

"Pay the forfeit, then, and presently. I have not only taken lessons, but have bested my master more than once. Are we ready to start?"

"A trifle rathe yet. Find a seat on that chest, there—it came all the way from the Bermoothes, when I saw service in His Majesty's overseas hell-fringes. Tell me, what sort of maid are you?"

"I am a maid, Colonel."

"If you are truthful, and in London too, the eighth wonder of the world has been found. Yet I repeat: what sort of maid?"

“Must you file us all, our complexions and tempers, heights and weights, as if we were cocks in training? But you want me to talk, and I—less the boy than the woman—never shrink from that. I am a singularly modern maid, and yet, in fine, highly untypical.”

“Item?”

“I have never loved, much less preëmpted the man’s rôle, and made love first, as is the custom of the sweet maids at court.”

“By Gad, but you are as rare as a roc’s egg!”

“Untypical, I said. I have little gold, moreover, and do not desire it——”

“And alive today!”

“—Precisely; for I get all that I wish without it. I am nineteen, a damned good hand at the foils or at pistols, ride like a cavalry trooper when he is sober, and drink my gin when I have a colic.”

“And when is a society woman without her convenient colic?” he chuckled.

“A lovely line,” she confessed.

“Not my own, worse fate. John Gay, the naughty poet whose ‘Three Hours After Marriage’ stirred the town so last year, sprung it at Will’s—I know not who he got it from. What more can you say for yourself?”

“Tell me now about the Mohocks; my own spring is run wholly dry. I know that your companions are all gentlemen of fashion——”

“Yes; though their courtesy is laid off as their masks are laid on.”

“You ruffle the good citizens of London in many ingenious ways——”

“You shall be judge, this night. I was out last Friday with the Indians; and what we failed to do! Can I recall. . . . There was a burgher, God shield us, an alderman at least, a stout son of a slut in silks and purples, with his great, gross, bedizened wife pussed up beside him. ‘Out with you!’ Out they tumbled from their coach, trembling all over. ‘Dance, damn you!’ ‘But I never learned—I am a Friend—a Quaker——’ We friended him; he quaked enough. A few sword pricks in the calf set him to frolicking like a lambkin in June; and as for his fat wife—I’ll shock your dainty ears, my lady, I fear——”

“A tierce of wine if you do.”

“We stood the old hag on her painted head, until she wept for mercy.”

“What’s shocking about that? Legs were made before farthingales, I venture.”

“And will last, God be thankit, long after ’em. These were agreeable victims; but we get some who are not so pleased to follow our words, and it is not so easy for them.”

“You poke ’em off?” She was embarked, and must not flinch the worst.

“Oh, not that bad. But when a man is bound and thwacked all over; when his nose is slit, and

flattened with the thumb till it breaks; when the eyeballs are thumbed artistically away from their sockets——”

“Well, not that for Westport. Some simpler bit of indignity——”

“Leave it to me, Fol—— Let me see: Philip—how’s that for your name, my lad? God filliped you from his thumb in some gracious moment——”

“If all the Mohocks have your courtesy——”

He slipped on his mask with a deft twirl of his wrist. “Now, you dratted hedge-spawn, put on that mask and hie at my heels, or I’ll——”

“I like you both ways,” said Folly-Philip, following his example.

They walked out into the street, and a short distance away, at a tavern, met with half a dozen more with the same vizards. Pett explained casually that he had brought a nephew along; and the group set out at once for the old cockpit on Shoe Lane.

The colonel fitted in his stride to Folly’s, and with her came last. He whispered to her all the way—little stories of Mohock exploits, gossip of the crescent scandals at the new court, and of the interred imbroglios of the former reigns.

“How long do you expect to remain a maid,” he bantered, “in such company as this?”

“Just as long as I choose to,” she answered him promptly.

“But, in the eyes of society, you’ll soon be an

outclassed thing, won't you, my dear? Unless you guard your name——”

“Was Castelmair outlawed, under second Charley? Are you outlawed, or Westport, for amorous dabbling? What's sauce for the gander is admirable sauce for the goose, you will soon find.”

“You grant you are one——”

“And know I am; which sets me far ahead of the rest of the world.”

“And a goose at a cockfight——”

“No goose tonight, but a Mohock——”

He ran his hand along her waist. “I will remember, my minion.”

The others had stopped in front of a dark entrance-way, and after a buzzing consultation, one knocked briskly on the unwelcoming door. It was cautiously opened from within. One moment later, the guardian had been trundled without ceremony down the line of midnight marauders, until he was held by Pett, Folly, and a third one of the crew.

“Shall we slit your throat now, or do we enter?”

The man's face frogged in his fright. “G-g-go right in——”

“Not a rustle from you, or, by God's son-ties——”

The eight of them passed within the hall, and down it to its lower end. The leader pushed open the door; the masked figures silently ranged

themselves against the inner wall, behind the outer ring of spectators.

A bout between two birds was going on at the time; interest was so tense upon it, that no one noticed the newcomers. Folly looked at the people, before she turned to the sport. There was a strange mixture of high and low: there were noblemen and rich citizens furbelowed beyond all reason, and so on down to farriers, joiners, tinkers, draymen, vintner's apprentices, and thieves and beggars from the dock regions. Ah, there was her uncle—his back to them, swearing on a be-draggled black cock who was lurching blindly toward his opponent, a princely Indian game. As she stared, fascinated, at the strange man-bred duel, she saw the Indian give one head blow at the black cock, who slowly toppled to his breast, and died.

There was an indescribable hub-bub as this bout concluded, and the crier announced the last contest. Westport, red and swollen of face, was shoving this way and that, shaking his money in the faces of one and all, laying bets with wild abandon; the same spirit animated all but the eight Mohocks soberly lined up against the side wall.

Now the cocks were released, and at it: blow after staggering blow, with spurted blood over the pit floor, and splashing out upon the front row of spectators. The betting continued at a curious rate; the cocks were apparently an even match.

Then came a series of springs from the heavier cock, which caught the other bird repeatedly off guard. Folly heard one man groaning aloud that the lesser bird was already blind. Yet he continued to stagger back to face his opponent.

Some wild fanatic was rushing around the ring, offering ten pounds against a crown. The men were holding back the birds now; the madman screamed incoherent demands for a taker for his bet, and found no answer.

"It's over," she heard on all sides of her. "Black Roy wins."

The onlookers began milling sweatily for the exit. The eight Mohocks gravitated together into a solid clot to one side of the door, and stood watching those who departed.

Here was Westport at last, a fleck of blood on his white silk waistcoat, voice hoarse, face haggard and shrewd. The eight let him pass, and tailed in immediately after him. Folly felt her blood racing, as the climax of the evening neared. Through the dark passage, past the doorman, who had not yet recovered from his fright, and out into the welcome sweet air they went.

As he reached the roadway, the eight Mohocks deftly clove him from his friends: the astonished nobleman looked up to find himself clipped between two masked figures, with half a dozen more pressing close around him.

"Tell your friends adieu," Pett's voice was as

masked as his face, "and hie along without any hurly-burly."

Deeming the matter some huge joke, he complied. The kidnappers made for Ludgate Hill, with the still amused nobleman in their packed midst. One or two from the cockfight showed a curiosity to follow; the sight of bare blades sent them quickly enough back into their own paths.

They struck the base of the hill, and had mounted half of its stretch, when Pett, by a low command, stopped them. "I hear steps following," he explained. "I have for quite a time, but wanted to make sure. Holla, you there," he addressed the shadows behind him, "come out into the light, where we can talk to you! What would you have?"

The man—there was only one—stepped boldly out and faced them. He was a great burly commoner, whom Folly had noted at the cockmatch. He must have followed silently all this way.

"Can't you speak?" continued Pett, in irritation. "Why do you follow decent citizens, engaged upon their friendly sport?"

"He is a good gentleman," the man grunted laboriously out, with a bent thumb toward the willing prisoner. "You won't hurt him, with Long Wat around."

"You're a Long What, my friend?"

There was a quiet snicker from the others. The man owled stupidly at them.

"Sure, I be Long Wat."

“Well, Long Whatever you are, get you back running on your toes, before I run something else through you.”

“He is a good gentleman,” the commoner repeated stubbornly. “You won’t hurt him, while Long——”

“Come here,” ordered Pett sharply. The huge hulk of the fellow came closer. With startling suddenness Pett flung himself at the other man; his two fists rose together at the staring face. There was a groan, and the tall man collapsed to the ground.

Pett kicked savagely at the man’s sides. “March on,” he ordered quietly. “He can sleep here a space.”

More sobered now, Westport continued with his captors up the hill. When they neared the top, the group, at a signal from Pett, stopped and drew away from their victim. He continued to face them with a pleasant smile.

“You have sinned, and for that you must pay your dole to Minos,” said Pett in a sepulchral tone. “Sir Seneschal, read you the file of offenses.”

One of the others, in an unimpressive voice swollen till it cracked, read slowly: “Item, that Stephen Westport stands too high at Court, and is a privy councillor.”

“Guilty or not guilty?”

“Guilty, my lords and peers. What penalty must I pay?” in unruffled good humor.

As if the whole unreal process had been rehearsed, Pett was ready at the cue. "It is solemnly decreed that you now delight us with a coranto, such as Claude Duval trod with a lady on Hounslow Heath."

"I was not born to dance in air without a fiddle," the raptive jested gently. "Nor is there lady here for me? Well, when needs must, one's best is all one has." With indescribable grace, for all his lanky form, and with a disdainful smile upon his face, the earl went through the elaborate steps of the dance. Folly could not help admiring his exposure in the masked night.

"Good. Proceed, Sir Seneschal."

"Item, that Stephen Westport hath too much of this world's goods."

"Guilty or not guilty?"

"Too much? Well, I'll grant that too: what man has not? Bare I came into the world, and bare I shall leave. So I'll say guilty, my lords—although my father and my sovereign perhaps should stand in the dock beside me. What is your will?"

"That you show your humility by grovelling on your hands and knees around our magic circle, meanwhile baying the faint moon; and conclude by laying your head upon the ground, and elevating your feet toward the zenith."

"All courts of justice, thought Folly, could be so prompt, apt, and sensible!

With a sigh of mock protest, Westport went through the ridiculous exaction too. His face continued in such sober contrast to his posturings that the Mohocks could not help but laugh; as he tumbled to his side, after a vain effort to stand upon his head, he joined heartily with the others.

He rose to his feet, dusting off his clothes; he was still serene and unperturbable. He was clearly above the horseplay.

“Good. On with your tale, Sir Seneschal.”

“Item, that Stephen Westport’s seductions are so multitudinous and unflagging, that there is hardly an unsullied damsel left in London, to the great discomfort of the noble Mohocks. Shall I continue?” addressing the leader.

“Proceed.”

“Item, that he hath turned the Thames garden of virtue into a wilderness of jades, huzzies, baggages, trulls, wenches, trollops, coazers, vixens, doxies, divers, slatterns and sluts.”

“What a man your criminal must be!” marvelled Westport, in high good humor.

“Item, that he hath already set himself after the new maids at court, with unexampled success. Item, that he hath installed his latest mistress in his own palace, thereby offending the sober decorum of His Majesty’s Britannic Isle.”

“Do you plead guilty or not guilty?”

“But why throw my virtues in my teeth, as charges?” he bantered, quite at ease. “Can one

plead guilty to this, without boasting? But to most of the charge, I proudly plead guilty. To the last item, confession and avoidance. I have never installed a mistress in my palace, because it never occurred to me to do so."

"Yet the young hussy has been overseen there."

"Oh!" A light broke on him. "Oh—not guilty, to that. The very reverse. The young woman in question is my ward, and emphatically not my mistress."

"Why not? Is she not comely?"

There was a general chuckle at this; but Westport's raised hand stilled the laughter. "My ward and my kinswoman, noble Mohocks."

"And untouched by you?"

"Absolutely."

"You harbor no designs against her?"

"None whatsoever."

"Should he not be punished for that, noble Mohocks?" There was another chuckle at the grave query. "Will you give us your word, Stephen Westport, that you will give no color of truth to this rumor, but act toward the girl as kinsman and guardian ought?"

"I give you my word, gentlemen."

"With our customary oath?"

"I will swear to repel her even, if she rut unmannerly."

"Bring then the sacred Mohock shrine, and let the oath be administered!"

From the obscurity, where it had evidently been placed or located previously, two of the masked figures brought out a barrel, with its head staved in.

“Mount within the shrine, criminal!”

With more reluctance this time, the nobleman did as he was bid. The whole thing had seemed like farce thus far, albeit unpleasing farce. Surely they would do nothing to really discommode him, Stephen Westport!

“Within this shrine you give your pledge?”

“I do,” with mocking serenity.

“Set him upon his way, with the sacred shrine as his company, that he may remember this oath!”

In a trice, four of the Mohocks had seized the cask, and laid it upon its side. One mighty heave, and it commenced its mighty helter-skelter descent down the murk of the hill. They could hear Westport’s cries and oaths, as he realized his plight, and tried to stop the passage. There was a crash off at the side, a groan, a renewed splutter of oaths.

“He’s only shaken up a trifle; but we had best depart, before he rouses the watch.”

At once the company made at a trot for a side lane down the hill, and were soon at its base by a different route.

“I’ll get you to my home now—” began Pett.

There was a sudden interruption from ahead. A group of men, a swirling surge far more numer-

ous that this eight, eddied around their progress, with jubilant cries.

“Fiend’s luck,” groaned Pett aside to the girl. “Here’s a regular pother of the Mohocks, and they’ll be going to Red John’s, where all unmask—Come with me, at once——”

It was too late. The newcomers had ringed the former group, fraternized with them, and were exchanging anecdotes of the night’s happenings. Folly found her arm torn in brusque good humor from the colonel’s, and, with a new companion on each side, knew herself one of a marching company swinging down the dark street, to the rhythm of a shouted, drunken catch. The girl soon made out the words, to the pretty tune of Mr. Gay’s—the roared troll,

“Then a Mohock, a Mohock I’ll be,
No laws can restrain
Our lecherous reign—
We’ll riot, and drink, and be free!”

A gross bass took up one of the stanzas:

“We will scour all the town,
Knock the constable down,
Put the watch and the beadle to flight;
Force all that we meet
To kneel at our feet,
And worship us, lords of the night!

Chorus there—and wake it!”

The whole body joined zestfully in the next stanza :

“The Grand Sultan shall own
His seraglio outdone,
For all womankind is our booty!
No complexion we spare:
Be they black, brown, or fair,
We make them fall down, and do duty!

For a Mohock, a Mohock I’ll be——”

It made an admirable marching song, Folly decided. She sang it and tramped ahead as lustily as the next.

CHAPTER X

SWORDS OUT

THEY surged at last into that strange sink of braggadocio called Red John's. As they trooped noisily to their seats, the man beyond Folly lurched into her, sending her reeling against the man on her right.

"Keep off my feet," he growled, "or I'll cuff you one on the mazard."

Folly glowered in turn, and spoke with tones of steel: "Keep your damned feet out of my way, or I'll ram my dirk down your gullet so quick you'll never dream what hit you! Is that clear enough, my friend?"

"No offense, master," in a conciliatory tone. "I didn't note you were pushed——"

"I've spilt blood for less" growled the girl, in as deep a tone as she could bring forth. "But it's no matter——"

Somehow she preëmpted a seat at the vast table, and set her wits to locating the masks she had started out with. A cautious wafture of the hand from directly across from her, and she had identified Pett, who was on edge to get his signal to her. She nodded gaily, to let him know that she would

see the thing through, and be wary for any signal he might give her.

The waiters brought in immense platters of turkey, the bird from the New World, and roasts of England's beef; with great pewter tankards of ale to wash down the food. The talk became uproarious, Folly joining in enough to lull suspicion, and not enough to wake it.

The topic, at her side of the table, veered to the King's levee that morning, at which he had touched a score of unfortunates suffering from the King's Evil, as the scrofula was named.

"One old man," scoffed a jovial voice down the table three seats from the girl, "told me that he had been touched in succession by second James, William, Anne, and now George, and trusted to be cured this time!"

"But the royal hand is a sovereign remedy," objected another.

"Just as shaving the hair, and applying pigeons to the soles of the feet, is an unerring cure for the spotted fever," inserted a meticulous voice to her right.

"You can't tell me——"

"At the Cathedral St. Denis, near Paris," the precise voice continued undisturbed, "I have seen relics which work wonderful cures. There was a crucifix of the true wood of the cross, carved by Pope Clement III—a sovereign balm for the dropsy; there was——"

“I can well believe——” Someone was desperately trying to be heard.

It was hopeless. “——a cup from which Solomon used to drink; a draft from it eased any ulcerated tooth. There was a nail from our Saviour’s cross, which cured the quinsy; a box containing some of the Virgin’s hair——”

“Now there’s a remedy for you!” roared the big jovial voice again.

“——for the ague; and a huge reliquary containing some of our Saviour’s blood, hair, clothes, nativity cloths, linen with which he wiped the apostles’ feet——”

“Wasn’t the tongue of Balaam’s ass there, too?”

“——and a part of the water pot in which our Saviour did his first miracle,” the precise voice meticulously stepped ahead, “all an inerrant antidote for the palsy. I saw them myself.”

“Amazing!” boomed the great jovial voice. “In the same church, did you see the monument to the Countess of Holland who had three hundred and sixty-five children at one birth?”

“Nonsense!”

“——mere zany!”

“I saw the basins hung up, in which each of the brats was baptized. But, you know, there’s no cure for some things. I come from Lancashire, I do; and all the kings from William Conqueror couldn’t heal a man bit by one of our serpents.”

“Out in Cornwall——”

“Why, our serpents,” he held the floor by bel-
lowing, “are so potent that they can poison a lark
in air.”

“Mere blether!”

“Fustian, man!”

“I tell you I have seen it, and, by God, you
don’t dare say I haven’t! These great snakes
watch the lark as he soars to his highest point, then
snake along until they lie right under the soaring
bird. Psstt! They shoot their venom straight up
into the air, until it reaches the lofty fowl. Again
and again I’ve seen the lark falter, and spiral
slowly to earth, landing always exactly in the
opened mouth of the serpent. Now if such
snakes——”

“When I was in Brittany——”

“——if such serpents,” in a voice of indescrib-
able force, “I maintain, can spit poison a mile in
air, and quell a bird, what would they do at close
quarters to a man? I ask you that!”

“Have you ever seen a drowned negro?” in-
jected the precise voice to the girl’s right.

“In Brittany, they say that——”

“——but I have, on my last voyage to
Hispaniola, in Captain Fry’s ship. Two of them
——drowned——and their skin bleached by the water
white as a paschal lily, as I am a Christian!”

A roar of laughter from the Lancashire man,
and several others, greeted this sober affirmation.

“Then I venture the black men turned green or magenta, on my word as a true believer!”

“But I insist——”

“Don’t tell me. A drowned blackamoor may turn pink or carmine, for all I care; but I say, and I say again, there is no cure, this side of God’s Acre, for a bite of snake or tarantula. I come from Lancashire, and——”

Folly, wearied by the blown marvels, spoke out with heavy vehemence. “Perhaps there is no cure for Lancashire,” she said, “but there is a cure for the bite of the tarantula, as every true Yorkshireman knows well.”

“Why, you whipper-snapper——”

“I tell you——”

“——give the lad a voice!”

“I tell you,” she persisted, amused at the dismay evident in Pett’s whole bearing across the table—clearly he wanted her to be neither seen nor heard, and very perversity made her continue—“I tell you, the music of the fiddle is an absolute cure for it.”

“That’s right!”

“——I’ve known many cases.”

“And my father told me——”

“Why, all harvest long,” one man corroborated heatedly, “in Yorkshire, the fiddlers promenaded up and down the aftermath, in the hope of being hired by those who are stung by the rascally creatures.”

Pett had risen quietly, with an imperative gesture to Folly to tail him. He made his way around the bottom of the table; and, coasting down behind the diners on her side, she did so. But two others rose with her, and came too.

“Where’s the room?” one of them queried heavily.

“I felt a touch of fever,” she explained cannily, “and merely wanted a breath of night air——”

Pett was with her now, and injected himself. “Come, this way——”

“Nonsense,” a burly interrupted, catching at her arm and pulling her into a vacant seat beside him. “’Twill do young blades good to zop up tobacco smoke and ale fumes. Zit down an’ strike up a chorus!”

Pett hovered distractedly at her back; he realized the danger more than she, and she sensed this at once. Well, if she could not, she could not, and there was an end to it.

“Order, order!” thundered down the table, from the head. “The chair is up!”

“——the hour,” Folly heard, “as Master Alex Pope hath amended rude Will of Stratford,

‘It is that hour of night when graveyards yawn,
And bosky shades prate daintily of dawn.

It is the hour——’ ”

“Ye’ve said that oncet,” roared out the jovial drunkard, far up the table.

“And once again. As the poet says again,
‘It is the hour when doleful sprites must fly,
Routed by day’s auroral pageantry.

It is the hour——’ ”

“There’s three hours already!”

The unperturbed voice of the chairman proceeded,

“ ‘——when minions of the day

Redeem the welkin from nocturnal sway,
And make the daedal globe the bright abode
Of day’s supernal and effulgent lord.

It is the hour——’ ”

He paused for the groan, which came, then he proceeded, “——when the noble Mohocks of London, alone awake in a world drowsy with night’s poppy-seed, are mured within the ramparts of their land of living dreams. It is the hour when we stand forth like what we are. Gentles all, put by your vizards of swart night, and show your quality!”

Amid a roar of acclaim, to right and left the masks were ripped off. Folly alone, a bit pale, edged back against the wall, and made for the outer air.

“Hey there,” an unsteady soldier barred her way, “off with your French cap, little one!”

“Nay,” Pett, speaking as low as he dared, and still remain impressive, knocked aside the hand raised to demask her. “The lad is right—I vouch for him. It is his hour to depart.”

“Judgment, judgment!” the half-drunken fellow bellowed. “Here is one Mohock who dare not show his face!”

“Be still, you zany——” began Pett.

“Take off your mask, young fellow—then you may depart.”

A group had swirled around the bicker. Folly stood facing them, on the alert, all unfrightened.

“Not so,” insisted Pett. “The lad is a prince of the blood royal, and it is not seemly that he remove the covering. I vouch for him, I tell you—he was with us——”

“Off with the mask!”

“A cowardly prince, if prince he be, which I misdoubt,” mumbled the jovial drunken voice, who had somehow made his way back to where they stood. “I marked him—didn’t he give me the lie direct, about the ways of the tarantula? A false prince, and a false liar—I’ll make him——”

Leaning across gracefully, Folly slapped her glove against the astonished mouth. “The lie is in your own throat,” she said sternly. “Gentles, adieu.”

“Not till you give me satisfaction,” bellowed the aggrieved giant, sobering rapidly. “You’ll answer to my sword for your currish talk, my fine prince.”

“It is a pity to soil my blade,” she spat out vehemently, “but, if needs be, I am ready.”

“Oh, come—a few words——”

“This is impossible!” urged Pett excitedly. “The prince——” And, aside to the girl, “——he is a noted swordsman——”

She answered him aloud, “Noted or not, I’ll prick him till his face look like his spotted fever.” She threw out of the side of her mouth to her protector, “I can fence, I warn you——”

Sighing resignedly, for he was one against all, Pett saw to it that the bulk of them were shooed away to the front of the tavern; and that only Folly, the loud-voiced Lancashireman, and two others were admitted to the court enclosed at the rear of the tavern.

“I name my principal as Mr. X,” he said savagely. “Your quality, sir?”

“Captain Raoul Pettibone, at your service—these are Viscount Crewe and Mr. Crabtree. If the youth apologize, of course——”

A scornful laugh was his answer from the girl. “I shall not kill you, Captain—let the King’s enemies do that for me. But I shall leave a token on you, after the surgeon is done——”

“Enough with words! My sword itches to get at the strutting cockerel.”

The young nobleman accompanying the noisy captain looked in alarm at the proceedings. “You’re drunk, Raoul——”

“I’m as sober as you are, Crewe.”

“Exactly what I fear.”

“I am as r-r-remote from intoxication,” began

Mr. Crabtree, in that meticulous tone which Folly at once recognized as belonging to the man who had sat on her right, "as this tavern is from the Antip-tip-tipodes." He brought it triumphantly out at last. "If the captain is no worse off than I am——"

"This shouldn't go on," urged Crewe obstinately.

"Perhaps I should allow the doughty warrior a week, in which to deterge himself of the fumes of the ale," said Folly, the hint of ridicule in her tone lost in the genuine concern she felt for her opponent's state.

Captain Pettibone crashed a heavy fist against a handy table, and held the floor against all comers. "You damned pock-souled sniff-higglers, can't it penetrate your pachyderm mazards that I am as sober as the blasted sphinx in the dratted Sahara Desert? If you think a few scurvy cups of ale can put Raoul Pettibone under the table, you're only glassing your squeamish inability to hold a man's drink in a man's way. I'm sober, damn you! I'll take you all, one after another——"

"Captain!"

"Or all together, if you insist——"

"Captain," said Folly gently, "you are so wholly sober that I shall be careful not to let my point touch you for all the words in the world. Your seconds may rest content——"

"And for my part," grumbled the bellicose cap-

tain, "I'll gladly spit you for your stinking fine manners and your blasted omniscience. On guard!"

A solicitous second at each hand relieved the burly captain of his cloak; impatiently he shrugged them out of his way. The girl shook her head to Pett; she would fight as she was.

With practiced wrist she threw her blade up for the elaborate salute. A moment later, she repented her courtesy; for the zealous captain made at her with a startling lunge, that bade fair to end the bout at once. Somehow she managed to parry, with a guard wholly unorthodox. She set herself at once to the business in hand.

The slim blades clashed together, apart, together again, weaving a fugitive embroidery of gleaming reds and golds in the mellow light from the sconced torches, aided by the lightening gray overhead. Up and down the points wheeled together, darting in and out like rays of light thrown by two mirrors. The captain sought with brutal force to fight down his slighter opponent's sword, and essay a finishing lunge. Folly, once she saw how the other neglected his guards, had to hold herself tightly to the double task of parrying the dangerous play, and yet refraining from a stroke that would really injure.

The unexpected resistance sobered up the Lancashireman completely. He began to fight with calculated ferocity. Engagement and disengage-

ment followed with bewildering rapidity, to the eyes of the onlookers.

Gradually Folly found it wisdom to give ground, as the persisting vigor of the attack held without let-up. She knew now that her skill was the greater, but her strength far the less. Her best parries were ruthlessly clouted aside, as if she had been fencing with a reed. She had been out of practice too long, she realized. Shrewd as ever to measure a situation, she began to fear that she might take a touch, for all of her skill.

At the right moment, she bethought herself of a boasted secret stroke, said to be unanswerable. She did not trust too highly in it, with an opponent forewarned; but the captain might not know it. A spatter of engages and disengages, which drew his sword subtly out of the line of the intended stroke; then, with a quick flick of her wrist, she stooped almost to the ground, in an upward lunge that, unchecked, would mean death; and that, checked in the nick of time, would throw the fear of death into a less sober man than the captain.

To her dismay, he met it with a deftness that argued full acquaintance with it, and came back with the only lunge that could grow from it. She saw the bright point snaking toward her breast, and felt in anticipation the sting, and then the horrid wrench, as the steel tore the flesh.

She clenched her teeth to take it, her senses quickened for any possible escape.

The captain's point suddenly stopped, froze a second before her astonished eyes, then wobbled away from her body, and wilted toward the ground. His body writhed in some peculiar contortion; his face showed a wry spasm of agony.

"Pox take that ankle!" he swore aloud. "When nothing else can, it—— O-oh!"

Solicitously she let her blade droop. "Some other time——" she offered.

"No; my honor is satisfied, Your Highness. You have a good wrist and a better head; I regret that, in my condition, I found it necessary to challenge you."

"'Tis all one," said Folly, pulses fluttering in relieved delight. "I regret that you misunderstood my words, which merely added to your evident wide knowledge of snakes and tarantulas and such small deer."

After a general cup of reconciliation, served by a tapster who had to be roused from his snores to yawn through his task, the five of them left the deserted inn, and at the first corner Pett and the girl bade farewell to the others.

"I regret this dreadfully," Pett turned a worried face upon her. "Here you've been gone all night, and by now the hue and cry may be all over London for you."

"Trust me for that," she yawned adorably, snuggling a bit closer to him. "My maid, Hannah, is a plain girl, but devoted. Unless the palace

burns down, she will lie like a courtier that I am in bed with a fearsome headache, and am not to be disturbed for anything short of the last trump. I will enter, too, through her room."

"Nevertheless, it will be bright day in two hours; and if they have discovered your absence——"

"My dear Colonel, I came of my own free will; I am of age, as a woman's age goes. I beg you to be quiet on that theme."

He was still unsatisfied. "I fear me your reputation is gone for good, my dear girl. Perhaps you had best plan not to return to the palace at all, but to make a fresh start with some considerate friends——"

Her laugh pealed out like matin chimes. "Now we begin to get at the root of the matter! How much better for your peace of body—must I say mind, good friend?—if I leave Westport, and fly for haven to the welcoming arms of my dear Pett! Nay, alas, it cannot——"

"That was remote from my mind, adorable miss; although if you insist on sharing my humble board and bed——"

"How prettily you lay the heavy burden on my soul! For this nonce, however, I shall return to my guardian's ruffled wing; perhaps later——" A side glance from her eye inflamed his desire still further, and taught him shrewdness in encompassing it.

"Be it so. And yet I fear that, slipping through

the brightening streets in that attire, you may be molested——”

He paused significantly, and she fell to studying her appearance. She made a good boy; but there was an appealing slimness that hinted of what was not boy. If she only had a cloak to cover her, as night had——

“With a cloak——”

He studied her judiciously. “That might do it. My lodging is on the way; I think I have just the thing.”

She urged his flagging steps to hie their utmost, and even at that felt herself the object of curious scrutiny of more than one pair of eyes, before they turned into his quarters. Relieved at this temporary safety, she sprawled at ease on a great chest against the wall, while he rummaged around for the cloak.

“May I offer you a breakfast of chocolate? I have all here——”

Why not see the jaunt through, now that she was about it? She got herself up to aid him, and at his suggestion laid aside her belt and sword. She did not feel a bit sleepy, for all of the wild night just completed. It was pleasant, besides, to bask in the open flattery of his glance and his consideration.

When they finished the leisurely meal, she rose reluctantly to depart.

“Not yet.” His tone altered to a silky purring

quality alien to it. "It really is not wise, adorable Mistress Folly. If you must return to Westport, let it be under the shade of this night's darkness. Give this day to me!"

"Merci, monsieur! But I go now——"

Without warning she found her arms pinioned behind her back, and his mocking face above her. "I have earned one day with you," he said huskily; his breath burned her cheek. "Is it not so, my glorious beauty?" Before she guessed his precipitate intention, his lips began to rummage upon her own.

Desperately she swung herself toward the ground. Here she hung locked in his clasp, her strained arms sorely twisted. At least, the horrid lips were gone.

"Let me go, you—you despicable——"

"O Mistress Fly-by-night, what inhospitality! Come, again——"

Instead, she slung out her foot, until the heel caught sharply against his own, and tumbled him down to one knee. His smile hardened to something grim: "So that's your game! What is not given will be taken, my fine filly. Here——"

He strained back to his feet, still holding her body locked by the clasp of her hands behind her back. Cracking her out from him as one cracks a whip, she felt her sudden momentum checked by the one hand he had held to; and saw his other arm clutching furiously for hers. With all the

force of her muscles she drove the loosed arm smack against his eyes, till he staggered at the blow. She snapped free the other arm, and, breast panting, poised a second facing him, free, for the moment at least.

She saw his wild lunge before he made it, and tumbled the table, with its load of dishes, books, papers, and bric-a-brac, in his way. He swore in outraged anger, as he tried to catch the falling obstacle, merely making its ruin more complete. Two leaps backward, and her hands clawed from the wall what she had seen there. Then, her nerves singing joy at the combat, she faced him, a long, wide-hilted rapier of the old style presented against him. "Now come on, damn you, and see what a maid may do, when she must!"

Ruefully he rubbed his smarting eyes. Then, overcome by the humor of the situation, he slumped back upon the chest, and laughed till the tears winked from the corners of his eyes. The sudden shock had broken the spell of his desire, as an immersion in ice-water might have done.

Folly stared in amazement at the transmogrification, from a panic satyr to a mere man, overcome by his mirth.

He managed to sputter out speech at last. "Damme if you're not the most amazing maid I have ever encountered! Your pardon, Mistress Folly, if you can grant it—for my awkwardness, that it——"

“It was inexcusable.”

“——Perhaps the fumes of the ale—or of your own intoxicating beauty——”

“You drank little enough of that,” she assured him straightly. “Will you stand aside, now, and speed me upon my way?”

“Not for the Milky Way would I do otherwise. I am wholly vanquished, Hippolyte. I grovel under your heel! Here is the cloak——”

“My sword?” she snapped out, still unmollified.

“In the entrance-way,” in humble amusement.

Holding the horrendous ancient weapon still toward him, she skirted the wall until she was ensconced in the door, the cloak over her arm, her own sword in reach. “Good day, Colonel,” she bowed prettily.

“Good day, you madcap princess——”

“And may I say that I am not wholly glad——” she paused for the full effect to sink in, and continued slowly, “——that my body was so strong?”

The sight of his mated face, as she said this, was reward enough for her. With a tantalizing smile, she vanished through the doorway.

At least, she assured herself jubilantly, as she walked with sober speed toward the palace, there was one man in London who would come at her call.

CHAPTER XI

A BLUNT WORD OUT OF SEASON

IT was barely turned eight, when the girl knocked softly at the outer door of the room where the maid Hannah slept. There was great relief on the servant's face, when she saw her mistress safe at home at last.

"I hardly slept a wink," she marvelled aloud, "fearful that some mischance had overtaken your person."

Folly's quiet laugh rang merrily. "Not me. But tell me—was I called for?"

"Only in the early evening. His Lordship bade me call you. Oh, but I lied valiantly, saying you were ill of the megrims. He grumbled a bit, but that was all."

"And not again?"

The servant's face wore a sly grin. "Not a peep about you; and, from the state in which he must have come in——"

"Do tell me!"

"I know little, madam; but I was still up, an ear to the keyhole, when he returned some time near midnight. What a terrible stew he was in!

His Lordship is an accomplished swearer, but he positively outdid himself! What with damning everything in the universe twice over, and more—”

“But what was it all about?”

“That I know not; but he was in a towering wrath about something, be sure of it. He had her Ladyship up, and—— Oh, lud, they’re knocking on madam’s door now! Let me answer it——”

Together the two of them tiptoed to Folly’s room. The girl slipped off her shoes and hid herself beneath the covers; the maid, a lugubrious look on her face, answered the summons. The words were all low; after a pause, Folly heard the door closed, and at once sat up. Here was Hannah back again, eyes dancing.

“I told him—it was young Master Maynard, come at his Lordship’s word to call you—that you were but barely rousing. You are called for in the dining room.”

“Tire me quickly, Hannah—I must see his face—after last night!”

It was a decorous and subdued Folly that presented herself, less than half an hour later, to the assembled Westports. The master of the house looked pale, she noted at first glance; otherwise, he seemed unchanged by his evening’s misadventure. Folly, for all her fresh patch and liberal paint, felt that her tired face must publish her lack of sleep.

“I am sorry, Mistress Folly, that you were indis-

posed last evening," said the duke quietly. "I had news for you. Today our Admiral is to be received at court; and I have high hopes that, if all goes well, you may follow soon."

She felt herself spitted by something unspoken in his tone. "That's high good fortune for Chris!"

Westport made a queer grunting sound, shaking his head. "That's as we shall see. If he plays his hand well," the suave tone purred meaningly, "it promises higher, as I have told him. The First Lord of the Admiralty is to have audience upon the state of the navy, and Chris goes beside, with my own word to His Majesty to commend him."

"He'll be Admiral yet!"

"That's as we shall see," he repeated gravely. "Chris has a stubborn humor, such as courts are strange to. I have urged him to bridle his tongue—out of the love I bear you, Chris——"

"Yes," the younger man shook his head, a somber light in his eyes. "I shall have no chance to speak, amid such great folks as my Lord of the Admiralty. If I were asked my opinion——"

"Which pray God you won't be, as long as you're in that mulish humor. At least, lad, be tactful."

"I shall do my best. Things were bad enough with the ships under Prince George; when he died, and this scanting commission took over the power——"

"Of course, of course," the elder man humored

him. "It's your manner I speak of. Tact is the half of diplomacy, do not forget——"

"And we come in—the navy comes in—when diplomacy has failed; we are never needed while then. Ordnance are singularly lacking in diplomacy and tact, as the Dutchman showed us."

"I give him up, Folly. Heaven pray he muzzle his tongue, as well as he may! I give him his chance—that is all man can do. We are expected betimes, Chris; you had best make yourself ready——"

A similar excuse sent out his wife. Always these subterfuges, thought Folly in irritation, to get in an edgewise word with her. Could it be that the influence of the promise to the Mohocks had worn off thus soon? She put the best face she could on the matter. "And I follow soon, Stephen—with the King?"

"If all goes well——"

"Good!"

"——With my hopes," he ended in soft mockery.

"Would you keep me from the king, till I waste into spinsterhood? I must see him, Stephen—for Will's sake——"

"The hour is for you to say."

The arrival of Chris put an end to the unsatisfactory interchange. Folly, making her excuses to the Countess, retired at last to her room, for the long postponed rest.

Clear up to dusk she slept, and was only roused by Hannah's timid call. The maid's face was a trifle scared; and Folly could make out nothing clearly from her, except that there was trouble somehow in the household. But the successful termination of her own adventure, and the marvellous balm of sleep, made her as light-hearted as a lark at sunup. She could hardly order her steps to decorum; they twitched into little tripping runs and quirks, for all her intentions of sobriety.

One glance at the three faces of those assembled for dinner, and she knew at once that something had gone seriously amiss. Chris, to whom she looked first, met her look with a hopeless stare, and, stopping a sigh that almost came forth, dropped his gaze to the table. The Countess wore alarm on her face; Westport looked more cynically devilish than usual.

The girl, wits racing, found her seat, and essayed at once to lessen the tension. "Did you enjoy meeting His Majesty, Chris?"

There was awed silence for a ghastly moment. Chris, a startled look at his patron, started to speak: "Why, I——"

"Oh, he enjoyed it," a torrent from the head of the table. "He cooked his goose till the blackened flesh charred on the bones; and singed my own, I fear."

"Why, I am sure Folly——" The Countess hesitated.

“I’d just as well out with it; Folly will learn it from you or someone, soon enough,” said Chris, holding his voice level with difficulty. “My Uncle Westport is aggrieved, because I spoke out, when speaking out was necessary.”

“Is it nothing to you,” broke in Westport shortly, “to have a chance a thousand young fellows in the navy would give an arm to obtain, and to throw it away as flatly as if it were rubbish, or worse? Oh, it was a scene that would have stirred your mettlesome heart, Folly! They were all there—the whole commission, admirals and captains of the fleet, lords and diplomats—and Admiral Christopher Maynard, chafing his young heart out——”

“My Lord!”

“The First Lord had just completed an elegant exposition of the state of the navy——”

“With less truth in it than London has snow in July,” said the youth savagely.

“And when has truth dwelt under the roof of diplomacy?” Westport paused a minute to let these words sink in. “His words satisfied the King, the rest of the commission, the men of the fleet——”

“Sir, as one of them, let me tell you that they writhe at the state of the ships, and the lying tongues——”

“Well, grant that some of them are churlish and unreasonable, if you will have it so. At the fit

time such matters could have been taken up with the First Lord——”

“Who has a private finger in every naval pie, and lines his own pockets——”

“But you’re living in a world of men, Chris, not of angels! You but indict him for his humanness. Then this lord and that, called on, spoke as elegantly of the situation—all translated to the Dutch pig, who could only grunt out ‘Neins’ and ‘Jahs’ like a great gross tun of schnapps——”

“Stephen!”

His wife’s protest was vain. “——When what did His Majesty do, after cracking a lewd joke or two with those two hideous molls in his train, than signify that he would like to hear from my nephew. Up jumps Chris, wild to spike the wheel—to break things generally——”

“Uncle, I have the welfare of England at heart. England will thank me——”

“Was Cassandra stoned? I forget,” said Westport cynically.

Chris shook the interruption away. “I spoke whereof I knew, and no more. Mr. Pepys did no less, a score and a half years ago; and things are no better today.” He swung in sudden appeal toward the girl. “Even our new ships, Folly, are built of such rotted timbers that they have not gone out of port—and could not stand a se’nnight of real water. They are like, rotted as they are, to sink at moorings!” Eyes flashing, he faced the earl

again. "If these rotted hulks crumbled under the gunfire of an alien foe, you would be the last man to thank me for ignobly holding my peace, when the chance to speak came!"

"Damme, Chris, I know you had the truth on your side; but I tell you this court of England, and indeed no court, is the place for truth. We live in a world of lies, polite, elegant lies; and the sooner you fit yourself for the world you live in, the better for you—and those near you."

The two men glowered at one another. Folly, still partly in the dark, asked timidly, "But just what was the lad's offense, uncle?"

"Ugh! The King would have the young Admiral's word; and he had an earful, I venture!"

"'As a practical man of the fleet,' they asked me——"

"But the last thing they wanted was truth: men are crucified for telling it, I tell you. Well, out it came spilling—lack of this and that, no powder, guns out of date, none of the ships seaworthy, no repairs worthy the name since Utrecht—out it tumbled, all the whole filthy, truthful mess. Even then it would have been all right—the First Lord was translating it to His Majesty."

"God in Heaven," groaned Chris savagely.

"——And I, who speak a little of the barbarous jargon, can tell you that what he translated differed in no whit from his own flowery speech. And then that damned James Stanhope, with all the suave

foulness he learned from his father Chesterfield, insinuated a polite correction, politely drowned out the voice of the First Lord, and gave the whole malodorous mess to the royal ear."

"He made a yeoman's job of it," said Chris, with defeated pride. "I understand the language myself, remember."

"Yeoman's job— My dear girl, he had the King's eyes popping out of his head, and 'Is it so?' 'Is it true?' 'Is it possible?' till the astonished Dutchman's voice grew hoarse from very wonder. Then Chris ended; and the First Lord, with all his diabolic skill—he hates Stanhope as much as Stanhope hates him—took it up point by point, granted that things had been so a few years back, and lied out of the whole cloth—swearing that each and every one of the complaints had been remedied; only, the young lieutenant had not kept informed of the recent state of the fleets. One by one the others corroborated what he said; and Stanhope—I am never sure whether it was merely jealousy of my power, hatred of the First Lord, or a mere desire to stir up contention—let the thing die down, with Chris disgraced, and nothing else accomplished."

"Well, if it's over——" Folly paused expectantly.

"He'll be over, soon enough," said Westport sardonically. "One of the commission pocketed me immediately afterward, expressing polite re-

grets that my nephew was so tactlessly zealous; and let me know that he would have the chance to cool his heels in the Carolinas, instead of the preferment I had asked for him. Not a captain now, but a discredited lieutenant, banished to the fringes of hell."

"Then you're to be shipped to America?" Folly asked it evenly, while her mind worked furiously.

"Such is my next assignment." He looked proudly at Westport, and said no more.

"Well," said Folly, her tones frivolling like a hum-bird's flight, "I cannot see that the First Lord could have done anything else. Will's there; you may be able to help him," she spoke strangely to Chris, then turned again to the earl. "You had warned Chris, hadn't you, uncle?"

The elder man flushed proudly. "That I had; and the ungrateful pup paid no heed to words of mine, but blundered smack into this filthy mess."

Chris's face was tense. "You think I should not have spoken, Folly?"

"There is a time and a place for everything, my impetuous cousin." Her face was a queer study.

"By Gad, I wish the boy had half your head on his shoulders!" Westport exuded approval.

"Perhaps he would not be satisfied with the half," she smiled over her inner panic.

This repartee relieved the tension a little; the subject was dropped for the rest of the cheerless meal.

At the end, Chris rose heavily, and stalked out. Folly, making her excuses, sauntered out a little later. Her steps did not quicken, until she was out of sound of the dining hall.

He was not in the halls, nor the portrait gallery; he was not in the library. All at once, she knew where she would find him. She fled down the long North Wing, and up the curved stairs to the great fretted door above. Here she paused to recover her breath: then, her heart still trembling, she pulled the door inward, and passed out.

There he sat, staring moodily off at the horizon. The twisted pillars and ornaments seemed menacing, repulsive; the air was as chilly as a cavern in bleak hills. Nor was there beauty in the western sky; only a leaden murk, repellent and hideous.

“Chris——”

No word of welcome came; she had earned none. She slipped over beside him, and slid down upon the floor at his feet. His hand lay listlessly upon his knee; tenderly she took it in her own. He looked at her once, in dumb pain, and let it lie there, dead and unresponsive.

“Chris——”

Still no answer from the brooding figure; nor would his eyes turn to hers.

“My dear Christopher Maynard, admiral of the navies of the færie queen beyond the sunset——”

“When I spoke to the King,” his voice was low, as if each word was wrenched out of inner agony,

“I felt your approbation of every syllable. I was abused, my lady, and there is an end on’t. Soon enough I will cease to trouble your corner of the earth with my undesired presence.”

Tears came to her eyes; she could not forbid them. “You poor, dear zany, what would you have? If I had sided with you—as I ached to do—it would not have aided you, in your extremity; and it would have exiled me from my uncle’s favor.”

“But—why would not that——”

“In which case,” she uttered each word as if weighed on a chemist’s balance, “my chance of meeting his Dutch obtusity would have gone away fluttering like a banshee at sunup, and I could not—I could not——”

“Yes?” He was all goggle-eyed with wonder at the strange light in her eyes.

“——I could not have had the inestimable privilege of telling him what I think of you, and of his own sky-wide stupidity? I have my own cause to hate his navy, which has not weighed anchor after Will; and now, added to this, yours. Oh, Chris, if I only get the chance, I will put a bee in his ear which will sting long after I leave him!”

“You mean that you really—— That what I said——”

“What else could you have said but the truth, Chris? Let the old—these damned old wreckers

of the world we live in—the old and decrepit mentally, physically, morally, spiritually—these who have made a stinking shambles of the world, and fatten like white deer on its decaying corpse—let them prate their venomous lies, for they can do no other. But the young—you, in all your blind and ferocious honesty, I, in my devil-betrayed audacity—we young will one day wrest the world from the old and decrepit, and make the world anew! We will make a world where young hearts can live, as two once lived, before the serpent of tact beguiled them to exchange Paradise for the apple of wealth and fame: Eden, for the cesspool of London!”

“Then you really mean that you will——”

“I may not be banished to America; but oh, Chris, I care for you now as I never dared admit to myself I cared before. Not love, no—that I am sure of: but I admire you—you alone of all I know in England—— No,” she laughed gaily, “there is something still to be said for Bloody Wynne, a man above the grime of cities; and for a few others I might name. But you were splendid, Chris——”

“And—if not now—— May I still hope, Folly——?”

“If it will aid you, God’s mercy, let your hope grow vast as a mountain range!”

He stared away from her, suddenly thoughtful again. “Yet I am not sure that you should do

aught—— Can I have a woman fight my battles for me?”

“My dear Chris, it is my battle I fight. A maid today——”

His head sank lower. “And I am to sail in three days.”

“What are three days, or three years, to us, who are young, Chris?”

“What is the hatred of all the world, if I know that you are beside me?”

“Yet I had tact,” she rallied gently. “I did not side with you then——”

“There is a place even for tact,” he granted painfully. “Not in my speaking, no; but you have the quick wit I lack, girl——”

“The sun glitters more on a tiny pool wind-rippled, than on a great still sea, do not forget.”

“I will not forget this night,” he said humbly.

The sky to the west did not alter; but to the two on the high tower its sullen murk was a soft cloud, veiling a holy of holies.

There were few more words. The very silence sang.

She went down alone, sure that Westport would be waiting for her. Chris, at her request, left by another way. She knew that the younger man was blind to Westport's fatuous admiration, and was sure that no good turn would be served by opening his eyes to this noble game, that their great protector was playing so gainlessly.

“Aha! I wondered when you would come,” he teased her possessively, drawing her as usual toward the dusk of the farther library.

“You will spare me, good uncle—since last night, my head has been ringing——”

“You are a maid of heart’s mettle, for all that. And, my dear,” he beamed out his largesse, “I have changed my mind. We are not at cross-purposes, that I am sure of. You know what I seek, and you will not always cross me. Once granting this——”

At his pause, she said with surface significance, “There is something in what you say, Stephen.”

“Good! This day three days, then, if I may have the honor of presenting you to my sovereign——”

She curtsied almost to the floor. “I overflow with gratitude, dear uncle.”

He edged toward her. “And now——”

“And now—you will pardon me, I know. My fondest adieu to Your Lordship, Stephen—my dear!”

His eyes expanded in pleased pride. “Good night, you sly little devil!”

CHAPTER XII

THE EAR OF THE KING

AFTER all, Folly reminded herself, how could she be sure that she loved Chris Maynard? She had known him briefly enough, Heaven knows: more than that, she had had little chance of knowing other men—well, that is. Of course, she had had an eyeful of the best that London had to afford; and sorry enough fare all of it was. Who would she take of all those she had met—if they were free, that is: her amorous uncle, or quivering, sensitive Innis, or sardonic Stanhope? One of the Mohock blood-spillers, perhaps? No, there was nothing fine, nothing high-aimed in all of them. Except for Chris Maynard, that is.

Oh, but what a downfall he was, from the man of her dreams! She had always seen this vision come riding into her fantasies, with a great, stern face like Richard of the Lion's Heart, or mighty Roland, or the knight of the lake. He would be a prince, at least; a king, or an emperor maybe, a knight whose name alone caused armies to tremble; yet gentle as soft wind in her presence. What a drop from this, to a mere lieutenant in the Hanoverian's navy! She must wait; surely the future

would bring her the knight of her dreamings. Plain, straightforward Chris Maynard could not be the one.

Yet she had begun to know kings and princes close. The kingship she dreamed was a flower of inward growth, after all.

Yet—a mere plain-spoken lieutenant!

Why then, she veered suddenly, did she labor so desperately to prove to herself that he was not the one? Why did her mind recur again and again to him, one unbending thing to cling to, in a world of slack virtue and sleazy morals?

She put him out of mind, as well as she could, and bent all her energies to preparing for the presentation at court. She had another charge on her soul, her brother's state: that must come first, in any event. With Lady Westport's ample experience to guide her, she could not go far wrong; it was merely the problem of looking so ravishing, that she could get her full will of the King. Her lips locked suddenly: that will, once vague, was almost definite now—a desire to be banished to the end of the earth, if need be, with Chris Maynard. As for Will—— But it was of Chris she thought most.

To be plain Mistress Lieutenant Maynard, perdie! Always seated below the wife of a captain, or the humblest lordling! No, that lot was not for Folly Leigh——

She put him out of her mind, again and again;

and, like her shadow, again and again she noticed him back at his old niche. She turned with hectic gaiety to preparing for the ceremony. The very day she was to be presented, the hour even, Chris was to sail. There he came smack into her thought again, she mused ruefully. Well, she would make it a memorable hour!

It was the great Westport coach of honor this time, with Mistress Folly beauty's self, if we are to credit the sober chronicles of gentlemen about the court. The journey to the palace was without incident. But just as she followed her guardians within the great reception hall, she heard her name called in a low, joyful whisper: "Folly! Thee here?"

"Prudence Scattergood, by all the smells of Bristol! What brings thee to the King's wicked town?"

The Quaker girl raised her eyes in rapt piety toward heaven. "The inner light, Folly. It has brought me hither, to expostulate with His Majesty, against all the evils of his ways."

A stern look from Westport caused Folly to hurry on, with a hasty promise to meet the girl afterwards. Folly was conducted into the audience hall, and found herself in a huddle of other well-dressed suppliants for the royal smile and grace.

To her amazement, the Quaker, in spite of the outward pomp of the ceremonies, was led up ahead of all of them. And then His Majesty entered, fol-

lowed by a clutter of courtiers and gentlemen in waiting, among whom Folly at once recognized the two dowdy women who received the royal favors so flagrantly. They were even homelier than she had imagined; if that was what a king selected, from among all the women in the world! What must his wife look like—the poor jailed lady who had looked too steadily on Count Konigsmark!

Stanhope, who stood beside the throne, gave Folly a low bow. She thrilled at this recognition so close to the royal person, for all her distaste at the royal choice. Then, ignoring the elegance among which she stood, the nobleman beckoned to Prudence Scattergood. Face alarmed, yet rapt, she came forward simply, stretching out a paper toward the royal hand. George the King gazed at her so intently that he hiccupped. A leer came over his face, as he addressed a remark in German to a slender youth standing just at his side.

“O King, thee must read this, and repent,” Prudence told him simply, extending her petition urgently at him.

Stanhope took it from her, and presented it to the monarch with an obeisance at least half mockery. He explained rapidly what the girl wanted. The King grunted out some amused response in bastard speech, which Stanhope sharpened and embroidered, in answering the girl. “His Majesty begs that you make his enemies quake, not him and his friends.”

“But, O King, God will make thee quake soon enough. God will——”

After another interchange, Stanhope smiled back the royal answer. His Majesty, he said, was honored to meet one who had the ear of the Deity, and trusted that the quaking would not unsettle the stomach.

“O King, thee knows——”

“Peace, maiden. The King has thy petition, and will consider it at his leisure.”

“Will thee repent of thy evil ways, O King, and dismiss these whores and whoremongers with whom thee are surrounded, and lead a life——”

“Peace, peace, child! Go in peace, His Majesty says,” Stanhope dismissed her more sharply.

“The voice of the Lord, O King!” she cried out dramatically, and clapped her hands with pretty decisiveness. There was a stir without the door, and a strange sight appeared in the entrance to the audience chamber: Isaac Scattergood, got up to represent the voice of the Lord.

The maids of honor screamed in feminine indelicacy, then giggled; the men roared aloud. For the man was naked, except for a brief hodden loin-cloth. In his hands he bore gravely a chafing-dish, containing burning fire and brimstone.

“May all men have legs like that!” exploded a maid near the throne, above the disorderly whispers and snickers.

There was an utter seriousness about the man’s

face that was, in these surroundings, quite side-splitting to most of his beholders.

“Repent! Repent!” he called out, in his loudest voice. “The day of the Lord is at hand! Repent, and be saved, or be damned to the pit of everlasting fire and brimstone! Repent! Repent!”

Out of the hilarious confusion the King asked to have the man set before him. Scattergood, once in this coign of vantage, began to inveigh vehemently against the wickedness of courts. The very hairs on his massive chest wiggled in condemnation of royal wickedness.

“The cook should eat his own broth,” urged an assertive toady.

“Repent! Repent! The day of the Lord——”

Tiring of the sport, the King gave an order. One of the courtiers came forward, dropping a silver shilling into the smoking chafing-dish. “An elegant performance, says His Majesty. He hopes to see it repeated at your regular theater.”

There were fresh outbreaks of mirth at this sally. Deeming that he had done his full duty, the Quaker marched stiffly out, intoning, “Repent! Repent! The day of the Lord is at hand!” as long as his voice could be heard from within.

So this was the caliber of courts! Folly did not know which to detest most—the blind zeal of the poor daft fanatic, or the nasty sneers of the court at the man’s sincerity.

One by one those who had been summoned were

presented to the King; until Folly's time came near. Her hands went cold at what she had in mind; but she did not falter. She had noticed the royal eye more than once straying and lingering upon her; and, indeed, that was small wonder. There were women, mature and young, in the gathering who would have set off any other group; but, in Folly's presence, they were stars bled to invisibility by the sun.

The King's hiccupping had grown more, rather than less. He had started the levee with an assumption of something remotely resembling the kingly; but, as the session dragged on, he slumped back into his unartificial face, which was stained and fouled with the inexpungeable records of night after night of drunkenness, with the two drab sharers of his bed and leisure who now hovered uneasily behind him.

One of the creatures—the one in the deep crimson brocade, with the ridiculous stomacher of diamonds and rubies—cleared her throat and spat noisily. When this did not seduce George's eye from his business at hand, she slipped up behind him, and stuck a familiar hand upon his shoulders, whispering in his ear some unheard word, that evoked a rude, unabashed guffaw from the monarch.

His greeting was more perfunctory now, he seemed about to rise brusquely, and wash his paws of the whole court ceremonial. The English lords

who mothered the ungainly royal chick clucked encouragement to him; their tongues tripped over each other's, in the clicking speed of their formal speech.

Stanhope himself stepped nearer, to sponsor Westport's introduction of the girl. At a courteous wafture from him, she swayed elegantly forward, tensely conscious that the monarch had quickened into interest at the mere sight of her approach.

She made her obeisance in the accepted way, and heard a guttural grunt of approval from the royal wastrel. "*Ach! Wie wunderschön!*"

Rising to her height, she placed a familiar foot upon the lowest step of the dais. "Here," she ordered peremptorily to the temporary queen with the diamond and ruby stomacher, "hold this for me——" extending her magnificent fan, as one would hand it to a servant.

The woman's eyes flashed; she drew back.

Folly's tone crispened to a verbal lash. "Take it, I say!"

The startled woman, used to commands from the royal lips, did as she was bid. A moment later, her face furious with anger, she let it fall—not noisily, but half compromising her irritation, since she was not yet sure of the royal mind. George's eyes twinkled into interest.

"What manners your German pigs have!" the girl exclaimed magnificently, disregarding the fallen gaud.

“I get it;” the King’s voice broke in a sudden intake of breath. He reached for it, felt himself unsure on his throne, and swayed back into place, holding on to his throne and his dignity with both hands. “Have it up-gepicked, und schnell!”

“It is a pleasure,” Folly’s tone sliced on, “to meet the boor who exiled my cousin, Lieutenant Maynard of the navy, for his truth-telling.” She beamed a dazzling smile upon the fuddled King. There was a gasp of alarm from Westport and a dozen others who sensed the situation.

The King’s eyes widened with pleasure; he asked vehemently what the *schones madchen* had said. A courtier started to soften the message; an insidious voice, of Stanhope again, gave the words their full force.

The King threw back his head and roared aloud his gross delight. “Splendid! Magnificent! A filly of spirit!”

Folly did not wait for the translation; she sensed the attitude. Her tones bit and stung: “Send off a few more like him, and you will rule an island peopled by idiots like yourself.”

There was no one to pass this brutal message; but George, his face screwed up into an attempt at thought, caught the one word, and repeated it like a crow of triumph. “Idiot! Idiot!” He went on to shout violently that the rest were all idiots, except this girl and himself. A real woman! A —— of spirit!

A catty maid relayed to the girl, in a hushed sneer, the royal compliment.

“If you had spirit,” she berated the King, carried away by her own fervor, “you could not bouse like a beer-hound, and soil our throne with mistresses as homely as your own swollen face. You are supreme, Your Royal Highness,” she made a low, derisive curtsy, “in your execrable taste and your execrable person.”

“Folly!” gasped her protector warningly.

The King rose to his feet, lurching a trifle, and steadying himself on the shrinking shoulders of Westport, who had forced himself near to choke off the girl somehow. The King spluttered ahead: a marvellous maiden! She would do credit to a king’s bed any night! He’d never seen a —— of such spirit, damned if he had! He turned an aggrieved face upon his courtiers; why didn’t they depart, and leave him to talk to this sparkling filly?

“So dreadful is the state of your kingdom,” Folly persisted more intimately, retreating a step to avoid the swaying royal paw that lunched out toward her, “that my brother was taken by crimps in Your Majesty’s seaport of Bristol—by crimps protected by royal officers and city watchmen. Your navy rots in inaction, instead of pursuing the villain who did the deed, and who now roams the high seas under the black flag: instead of pursuing him, sailing down the evil vessel that holds

him captive, restoring him to his family, and hanging mast high the devil that did this!" She paused for breath, but was ahead of the others again. "The one man who dared tell you the truth, in your whole kingdom, you have banished to America. Well, my royal mountebank, banish me too, and make a clean sweep of it. No——" she hissed away his reaching clasp, "——still keep your filthy fingers away——"

With all his urbanity, Stanhope interfered, shooed back the swaying sovereign, and brought the levee to a close.

Folly, breasts storming, followed her speechless protector out of the palace. A thunder-cloud would have been a baby's smile, compared to the lower of his brows.

Stanhope, his face marvellously working, followed them down to the Westport coach.

"The damned little fool," groaned Westport aloud. "Disgraced by my nephew and this light-headed chit—all in one week, James!"

"Shrewd vixen," said the great minister admiringly. "Do you know what the Hanoverian is spilling over the throne-room? He'll have the girl for his mistress, he swears, if he has to throttle the whole court!"

"You have won your point," said Westport bitterly to the girl. "When will you take up your residence in the royal harem?"

"When you are born twin girls," she taunted

icily. "Mistress to that Dutch swine? How you honor me—as you have honored England, by raising such a drunken carcass to receive your courtesies and your obeisances! I'd stab the royal whoremonger, before I'd lie with him!"

"Hoity-toity!" marvelled Stanhope again. "There is a deal of spirit in your family, Stephen, damme if there isn't. If you or I had that much——"

"Then you'd best get out of England, before the cock crows again; or you may have to," in a despondent tone from the earl.

"Nothing would please me better," she said angrily. "Chris Maynard sailed at the hour I was led to kiss the pudgy swine's paw; Will is somewhere against the wall in the Americas; the foul Blackbeard sails the seas unmolested; what has Folly Leigh to do here, with so much undone abroad? Let me go, and quickly!" Her breasts worked beyond her control.

"She will have to go." Stanhope came abruptly down to earth, and turned to Westport. "Or you must mure her out of sight and hearing for months, and swear to the King that she is gone—— I had a private word from the Frau you know, who said to lose the girl, or she'd wring her neck. What'll you do with her, Stephen?"

"How in the fiend's sweet name do I know? Beauty in anger—for the slut is lovely, damn her—— What can I do with her? And that pig

rutting after her—— I'll have to take her to the Colonies myself, I suppose."

Stanhope bowed gravely, a twinkle in his eye. "Did you not tell me once that the Countess, for her health's sake, needed a voyage upon England's wet ramparts?"

Westport stared at him with brightening friendship. "So I did, so I did. Hmm—— The Countess gone, Folly gone—and you and I, James——"

"Precisely. No more volcanoes. Besides, she's too dangerous to have roaming around loose," he spoke intimately, ignoring the girl's near ears. "Either with the King, or someone, she'd stir up hell upon hell, till she got wed; and God pity her husband, unless his wedding bed is padlocked from every hot male in the kingdom!"

"Yes. She's too damned good-looking to have around, and that's clear. You've rendered me a favor, James; you show the way. My heart's thanks to you."

"I feared you and I might have to fight over her, Stephen——"

Westport chuckled grimly. "She goes, and presently."

"While later, then."

"Drive home," Westport ordered curtly.

The great lord softened toward the girl from then on. He spoke to her gently; perhaps she had done little harm, with that fool on the throne. He

had no mind but for women and stinking foreign brews; she had pricked him in the right spot, after all. She wanted to go to the Americas; well, it was not such a child's wish, after all. The Countess needed the sea air for her health; he would commend the girl to his dear friend, Governor Eden of the Carolinas, a courtly gentleman beyond the seas. There was a ship sailing within the week; she would understand that in the meantime she would not be flaunted around palace or court.

She bowed gratefully.

Once in the Colonies, she could search to her heart's content for her brother, and doubtless find him. She could try her spitted fire on the lecherous red men, he added cynically, if the Governor's court was not enough.

"But before you go, Folly, you damned little temptress——"

Gently she repelled his arm. "I have taken my soul on this new quest, Stephen. When Will is found, and Teach is underground, then, perhaps——"

"But you mean nothing to me in those words," he looked clearly into her.

She answered him as honestly. "No."

He bowed, in quiet cynical surrender. "I shall bid my grandson court you, in his day," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

STORM

FOLLY was kept all in the dark as to the preparations for the trip to the Carolinas. She was allowed some word in the selection of a more elaborate wardrobe than she had ever dreamed of actually possessing. In this, she had the aid of the Countess—a lock-lipped and slightly hard-eyed patroness, with tell-tale red rims around her eyes. Beyond this, she was told nothing, until, five days later, she was driven down to Gravesend, where she had her first sight of the *Royal James*, in which she was to sail.

While Westport and his wife were making final arrangements, an old seaman swayed by, and stopped to comment on the ship. “Eh, she’s a bluff, apple-cheeked, flat-bottomed devil, the *Royal James* she is. She gits there, she do. Eh, she gits there.”

“Is—is she fast?”

“Fast, you says? Mebbe she be, an’ mebbe she ben’t. Not in dead weather, she ben’t. Give her a fairish wind, an’ she’s a reg’lar roll-along-blow-along old girl. Eh, she pull in her topsails, she do, if it blow nothin’ at all; barrin’ that, she gits

there. Not in this wind, Cap'n Elton won't loose her ground-tackle; not he."

"You mean that she won't start today?"

"Eh, he don't like a blow, Cap'n Elton he don't. Not Cap'n Elton. Fair-weather Harry, they call 'im. Not in this little puff. Not Cap'n Elton."

And so it turned out. The coach trundled them back to Westport Court, for a delay that all took, as if by agreement, in a highly philosophical spirit.

That night the wind whined and snickered about the eaves without let-up; if anything, at sunup it was blowing more freshly. One day more of inaction seemed inevitable.

And then, about noon, the wind suddenly tempered. There was a hurried lashing of the coach horses, that brought them in some turbulence down to the quay. In a sort of a daze Folly felt the heave and tug of the harbor swell beneath her, clambered up the ship's ladder, bade Westport farewell—the lips this time, not the cheek—and stood fascinated as the sailors heave-ho'd and chanteyed the last topgallant-sail into place.

So began the long voyage. The Countess showed no sea-legs at all, and had to take to her cabin for most of the time. This threw Folly upon her own ample resources. The passengers she found distinctly uninteresting: a few colonial merchants testy over the onerous Acts of Navigation; several suspicious papists bound for Maryland; and, for the rest, Englanders bent to the

colonies for their ill-success at home, often of a sneaking, criminal nature. But the sailors from the first captivated her. There were no crimped men among them, but queer weazened veterans who had followed the sea since childhood. Captain Elton preferred a crew he could trust; these had been with him for many voyages.

All but one of them, Folly discovered. The exception was a brawny half-Spanish chap, who called himself Juan Hickox: a strange, silent man he seemed to be, with a great scar parting his face from the left temple, to be lost in the swarthy undergrowth of his beard. He did not dislike the girl, she felt from the start; yet, while the others spoke with free civility, he held his silence. She found it more enjoyable to sit quietly near where he was working, or to stray into the neighborhood of his watch and seek to absorb the sea through his eyes, than to sample the easier company of the others.

For a few days the wind was fresh, and the ship ploughed forward under shortened canvas. Then a warm spell came in, with interminable stinging, misty rains. One night this broke suddenly into a squall that carried away the fore-royal mast entirely. The next day they lay by to mend the riggings, a proceeding much halted by a great eclipse of the sun, which lasted from noon until after three. The wind continued contrary and impetuous into the night.

The next day, a Saturday, dawned cloudy. By eight it had cleared, and the fore-topsail and then the main-topsail were set. There was very little wind, but a great southern sea; what wind there was came in small whiffing gusts, one of which split the spritsail. This was easily mended, and she got under way again.

During all this time, the girl had kept at it with Hickox; at last, her very persistence began to tell upon the taciturn seaman. She began to volunteer details of her own life; soon his questions drew out more than she had intended to reveal. Her adventure with Bloody Wynne, her scene with the King, drew many a quiet chuckle from him. She, in turn, could hardly force her eyes away from the strange, pale scar, that burned red as his face twisted into a laugh.

“You’ve come through summat unscathed, Mistress,” he said slowly, slitting his eyes.

“You have been through more,” she answered quickly, “and not wholly unscathed.”

His slow hand rose, and traced out the corrugations of the scar. “Aye. Ye’d like to know how I earned that love-scratch, I’ll wager.”

“If you wish to tell——”

“Ssh, Mistress! Hurt in a brawl, I tell this sober vermin aboard the *Royal Jack*; aye, that’s what I tell the likes of them.” He paused, and spat meditatively over the rail into the swirl of green below.

“Yes,” she prompted uncertainly.

“Not to you. Ye’re summat of a hell-minx yourself, I misdoubt not. So was the man as give me this sweet token, devil take his foul bones!”

“And that was——” Evidently the story needed frequent urging.

He squirmed closer to her side, and lowered his tone, making sure first that he was not overheard. He nudged a thumb toward several of the sailors, some distance off. “They’d hang me high on Liverpool docks, if they got wind of it, the psalm-singin’ dogs! It was Bartholomew Sharp done this—Cap’n Sharp hissself, shrivel his foul soul! Ye’ve heard tell of Sharp?” A quick, suspicious query.

“I—I never heard——”

“Naw; ye wouldn’t. A pirate he were, Mistress—summat of a pirate he were!” He paused, to let the full force of this sink in.

“I—I’ve never known any——”

“—An’ a bloody son of a bloody mazard,” he interrupted with aloof courtesy, sails set upon the narrative at last. “We sailed up from English Gulf, we did, down by Magellan Straits it were, aimin’ for the Straits we were. Cap’n were drunk, he were, an’ played us some devil’s trick with the compass, an’ blundered us out into the ocean. Twelve mortal weeks we sailed, we did, an’ only luffed into Barbados by chance. That’s the kind

of navigator Bartholomew Sharp were, Mistress.”

He paused, and spat reflectively. This time, Folly respected his silence.

“We’d been out a month or more, an’ I roused up some lads of mettle; them an’ me was goin’ to stick a dirk in his midriff, we were, or shoot him if the knife miscarried. Some foul tattler took him word; he claps me into irons, an’ bound as I were, he comes at me, drunk an’ all, an’ takes a lunge at my neck. I twists down as his blade falls, an’ throws myself to the side; an’ he does this to me.”

“You—what could you——”

“I were gone, Mistress; for a week I didn’t know beans from barley. They held him back, an’ took away his knife, Cap’n as he were an’ all, or he’d ’a’ ended me there an’ then. So I gits well, an’ we hits the islands, as I were tellin’.”

He paused again in telling his story, staring through her.

“You—you were lucky——”

“Eh, I were, I were. We give away the ship to some of the men, we did, an’ some sailed on the *Lisbon Merchant* to Dartmouth, an’ some sailed to Bristol, an’ Sharp he stayed behind, he did, him being Cap’n an’ able to pick up another crew an’ ship, he were, an’ me——” he paused, to make this doubly impressive, “—an’ me, I stays behind, all unbeknownst. Yeah—I were lucky, I were. I got him!”

Folly felt a disposition to retreat away from the man's glare. "You——"

"I'll tell ye all. I came afoul of him one dark night, him sober for oncet. It was him an' me for it, it were. That's the yarn, Mistress. He won't gouge no more honest shipmates' faces, not he, not Bartholomew Sharp, shrivel his black soul!"

"You—you killed him?"

"Aye, I killed him, right enough. An' he ain't the only one, Sharp ain't. Not he. Now you see, Mistress, why I don't want this godly vermin to know who Juan Hickox is—else my time wouldn't be worth a Dutchman's damn—clapped in irons aboard, an' strung up at the nearest port."

"What are you doing on this sort of ship, then?"

He stared across the slow waste of waters. "A man as knows the sea never knows anything else. A man as knows the black flag never stands straight under anything else. That's me, Mistress. I got marooned from another ship, I did; an' when luck threw me back to England, I crimped a bit out of Bristol, waitin' for the turn of the tide, in a manner of speaking; waitin' to join the black gentry, to out with it. An' here I am; in the Carolinas, they all coast in—the pirates do——"

"Hickox," the second mate slashed angrily in, "I been lookin' all over for you. Get the hell up forward—pardon the way o' sayin' it, Mistress—I ain't seen you there."

With a warning contortion of his face, that

brought the scar out vividly again, Hickox shambled along as directed. Folly, left alone, fell to studying the world of sea, that was the only world in sight.

She let her fancies go roaming out toward the level horizon, a wild waste of dun green waters, with a shifting cast of blue from above. There was nothing else, nothing but the endless diminishing swell, in which there could be nothing friendly, nothing redeeming. The world she knew had dropped away to an invisible unreality and an eternal non-existence: the world ahead was nothing but the endless sullen suavity of waters. No life—no visible life, at least; whatever life there was moved and heaved in utter under darkness, and was no life such as she knew and loved. It was too immense, too unnoticing, too inhuman.

Her eye for very pain glided closer, within the very shadow of the ship. Here, her soul fixed on one wave, she could see contrast and variety, which was the essence of life ashore. That great smooth white-frothed comber there, swelling oilily upward toward her—an intricate design of foam upon it, a dark mass of seaweed now at its height—yet even as she watched, the dark heart was gone wholly, the pattern wavered, shifted, altered again, a bewildering and annoying kaleidoscope: and now the whole wave, with an upward lap toward her face, as it collided with the side of the ship, vanished by mighty suction out of sight.

Another and another she sought to fix her soul upon: no sooner fixed, than each one was no more.

Was there nothing fixed, nothing stable, nothing to cling to, in all this watery skin of the solid globe? Men at least—she herself—these were at least stable. No, she was altering hourly, aging insensibly, as were all men: time itself seemed a vast, unstable, unanswering human tide, down which men went drifting—down which she went drifting: tumbling now up into a sky ecstasy, flung now into an abysmal trough of dejection. With, at the end, the light heart of her own wave gone glimmering out of sight—into what ultimate light or darkness who could tell?

Wise men said that there was a world of fixity, of eternal serenity, which she could earn by a life strait-jacketed thus or thus—— But which of the many conflicting ways? And what heed should she give them, when all who shone or darkened in man's eye paid no heed to the sagest counsel?

She rose, saddened by the black enormitude of the world of eternal alteration; she passed down into her cabin. Was there no land left in the world?

That night she kept a watch for the Spanish sailor, but could not locate him. Early the next morning she saw him working sardonically away. She made it her business to near him again.

“Did you ever encounter,” she began diffi-

dently enough, "a pirate named Teach, in any of your wanderings?"

"Pirate, Mistress? Crimp he were, an' no pirate, when I knew him. In Bristol it were, an' I crimped a bit mysel', it being so to speak a holiday for me from my true trade, which is with the black gentry, as they say. Teach—Ed Teach—Blackbeard he were called, for his foul black-bearded face, all hair an' no skin. Ay, an' a nasty one he were; I said summat he didn't favor properly once, an' he outs with his dirty dirk an' comes at me like all hell blown loose, he did. My mates held him off, that they did; but I'll bear him a bang for that yet, pox take me if I don't—him an' his dirty pride an' his ugly black beard. Says he's pistol-proof, Teach does. I'll Teach him!"

"But he is a pirate now, they say——"

"I heard summat o' that; I misdoubt if he be, though there's cause enough to drive all dishonest landsmen into an honest calling. Eh, piratin' ain't what it were once, an' that's a sad fact. Me, I've served with Francis L'Ollonais once, that I have, before I went with that dratted Sharp. There were a man for you!"

"I may have heard of him——"

Eyes half closed, pale scar reddening at his cruel smile, the Spanish sailor did not heed her words. "No milk-an'-water, psalm-singin' pirate he were, but a man as did honor to the black flag. Many's the tall ship his broadsides's pierced

like a colander! Ye've heard of him, ye say?"

"I think——"

His voice sank lower, his eyes gleamed small. "I were with him, I were, when he sacked Maracaibo, yes, an' Gibraltar too. I mind one day we were near San Pedro, when a snivellin' troop of Spaniards hid on us, an' stormed out like fiends from a graveyard at black midnight. Most of 'em we killed, an' L'Ollonais he twisted out of the few prisoners somehow that there was more ambuscades ahead of us. Yes, they egged him on, there were; an' not a one of 'em would show us how to get into the town around 'em. What did Cap'n Francois do, do ye think?"

"He—he killed them?"

"He were an unmerciful man, were Francois L'Ollonais. He pulled out his cutlass—I stood as nigh him as you are to me—an', Zouppp! he had crashed open the first man's breast, that quick, with no word at all! I saw his hands, blood an' all, as he plucked out the man's heart, and gnawed it with his teeth like a hound would. Ate the heart, he did, an' him close to me as you are now! 'Show me the way,' he roared at 'em, 'or I'll serve ye all this selfsame way!' He would of, too; that he would of!"

He paused to ponder.

Folly at length prompted again, "They showed it?"

"Ay. They showed it, right enough. He were

a man of his word, L'Ollonais were; no drunken, lying hog, like some I could mention. I don't know whether I'll feel myself, with all these modern, higgledy-piggledy pedlars an' holders for ransom. Ay, I wish myself luck: maybe I can find one craft where a pirate is a pirate!"

This was only the first of many astonishing reminiscences; the veteran's bottled-up memories almost overflowed her.

The weather continued easy, but the sky threatened trouble. It remained a threat for two days. The second night, Folly dropped off at last to sleep, in spite of the uneasy heave of the ship. She woke out of a horrid topsy-turvy nightmare, to find the ship rolling and bucking convulsively, with no steadiness discernible.

The Countess insisted that the girl stay within the cabin: the noblewoman herself was on her knees, moaning over and over again the prayers against danger from sea and flood. She would not let go her clutch of Folly's hand; the girl had to compose herself, for all the muffled commotion outside, until day filtered grayly into the cabin.

The fury of the tempest was still upon them. The moment she appeared on deck, the mate cursed her below. Dodging out of his sight, she made for the deck. She looked upward: the whole familiar scene was altered; the foremast snapped off halfway up, the mainmast a mere stump; only the mizzen still stood. The sailors were cutting

away the rigging of the foresail, which was causing a perilous list as each sea washed against the dismantled vessel; the main rigging was gone already.

She saw a great sea running in the air toward her. Only her ready wit in climbing a stairway toward the wheelroom saved her from being drenched through. Part of the crew were throwing overboard spare barrels of water, and heavy bales from the cargo; the great ship's cable was eased away while she watched. From the screamed commands, she understood that the pumps were working badly. The *Royal James* had been sheared of much of its royalty, by the rude shouldering of storm and sea.

The Captain himself besought her to go below; she imperiously refused his insistence. On her head be it, he worried solemnly; it might make little difference, within a few hours.

Indeed, the day never dawned rightly. The heavy sky hardly lightened; the storm continued unabated. Somehow the emergency efforts sufficed to keep her floating, and all the long afternoon and night the men struggled for bare life against the heavy-handed elements.

Then, two hours before the second dawn was due, the fury flowed away, the vast heave subsided, the sea calmed again to strange, treacherous tranquillity. Only then did Folly go down to her cabin, to find the Countess peevish because

there had been delay in her last meal. She did not and would not realize that the ship's life had been in danger. Westport had arranged for passage to America, she explained simply, and of course passage to America they would have. She regarded the storm, now that it had gone, as a bit of inconsideration on the part of the captain; and implied that she intended to write to her husband about it.

Folly escaped from this, after a couple of hours, and made again for the wrecked deck. As she came to the top of the companionway, her eyes lighted with wonder and delight. Within a mile, a great ship was bearing down upon them, ship-rigged, as meticulously spick-and-span as if it had blossomed softly out of a tempest.

"It will be our salvation!" she gasped in charmed wonder. Seeing the Captain staring moodily at the approaching stranger, she repeated her remark for his benefit.

"Note its flag," he said somberly. "Salvation, my lady?"

She made it out then—a brilliant flutter of black against the pallid gray clouds.

"Pirates, of course," she said simply.

All at once a strange feeling washed over her: she felt that she had been through this before: that she had all but known that this was an inevitable chapter in the trip; that just below thought had hovered a foreknowledge of this meeting. It

seemed to be an echo of something she had lived: just so, to her out of desolation, this bright-bellied splendor of sea-wings had come over the damp rim of the earth.

Somehow she sensed beyond this that the thing was for her benefit, rather than for the crew and the passengers: that it had been she only who had been buffeted by the storm, and who was now visited in her torn haggardness by the white-winged bird with the bright black plume in its crest. She dramatized the whole thing abruptly within herself: she was stepping from the wreckage of old England to the firm deck of stern vice, of disregard for man's broken tablets of stone, of regard for sterner, older laws graven in the elements, before man had opened timid eyes for the first time upon his callous earth.

She felt—more and more clearly it came—that the pirate craft came for her rescue, indeed, at her bidding. It was her serfs who drew near, to hail her, their queen.

By now, the black-badged stranger had come within hail. A man, erect, sturdy, called across the tempered heave, "*Royal James*, stand by as a prize."

"What ship are you, and under what flag?" Captain Elton called out against hope.

The voice bugled in black joy: "*The Queen Anne's Revenge*, a ship-of-war of forty guns, Captain Edward Teach commanding. We fly the Jolly Roger. Stand by; we are coming aboard."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLACK GENTRY

As the evil news broke over them, pitiable confusion possessed the decks of the *Royal James*. Captain, mates, passengers, many of the crew, thronged, distracted and leaderless, in the waist.

“My God, what can I do?” groaned the Captain aloud.

“Best give in without bloodshed,” urged the first mate, his face strange with fear. “They wouldn’t kill unarmed men——”

“That’s true, that’s very true——”

“That’s just who they do kill, axin’ your pardon, sir,” one of the hands scowled at the trembling officer. “They’ll have all of us walkin’ the plank before nightfall, you may lay to that, sir.”

“I’ve heard that too,” Elton hung a troubled head.

“Why not stand by to repel boarders? We can kill them as gets aboard,” the Spanish sailor pushed himself boldly in front of the chief officer. “If it’s Teach, we’re good as dead already; just as well take a few gentlemen o’ fortune along.” Something fugitive and shocking scurried across his eyes, or so it seemed to Folly, who was watching every play of emotion in the tense see-saw.

“If I knew what to do——”

“I’ll lead ’em,” said Juan Hickox desperately. “Shall I order hands to cutlasses, to repel boarders?”

“That might be best——”

“Out with your blades, men!” in a piercing whisper, that could not be heard by the pirate boat, which was already nearing the dismantled ship. “Hide behind those bulwarks there—be ready to rush ’em!”

The mate, finding the Captain unoccupied, caught him frenziedly by the shoulders. “This is suicide for all of us, passengers and men alike! Best yield without a struggle, Captain——”

The driven Captain stared at him emptily; his eyes slowly lidded. “I think you’re right——”

Without further word the mate rushed off, and reappeared with a small rope ladder. Elton, still of two minds, veered between giving a hand to the mate in fixing the ladder, and seeing to the placing of the armed sailors.

The spell was broken by a great voice, breaking like quick thunder in their midst. “Surrender, in the Governor’s name!”

Teach, alone, appeared at the top of the ladder. He swung himself over the railing to the deck, and stood, scornfully magnificent, facing them.

At the very moment, a sailor, cutlass in hand, sneaked down behind the mate, and cut the rope ladder.

There was a medley of shrieks, a splashing from below: evidently at least one of the pirates had taken an involuntary bath.

“Use your irons!” For all the great roll of his voice, the pirate chief did not take his eyes an instant from the crowd on the deck. From the Captain down, they stood aghast at his horrid appearance. His face was dreadful enough, with its black meteor of hair running from the eyes down into a great black beard, tied with blood-red ribbons over his ears. More than this, lighted matches sputtered on both sides of his face, stuck in the hair under his hat. His wild eyes roamed like a fiend’s; he stood at ease, his cutlass in its scabbard, his six pistols swinging from bandoliers over the two vast shoulders.

“Rush him!” screamed Hickox, appearing from behind the bulwarks at the head of his armed sailors. “He’s only one man—— Kill the black devil!”

Blackbeard gave a hideous laugh, that stopped the more timorous of the sailors as if a hand had clutched them. With a motion so quick that eye could hardly catch it, he had two pistols out and bearing on the breast of Hickox. “Aye, one man I am—and one man you are. Stop, in the devil’s name, before I blow your foul breast wide open!”

The Spaniard halted, transfixed by the glowering ferocity. The other sailors could have rushed, but they durst not stir.

Teach laughed again, a gruesome cackle. "I'll be hung and sun-dried, if it ain't my old friend Black Juan, the dirty crimp! Up irons, and a-board!"—a summer thunder to his men below. "My old friend!" There was a dreadful sardonic caress in the words.

At the moment, two of the buccaneers appeared at his side, then two more. Teach gestured with the pistols at the nerveless sailor. "Take his blade."

Hickox, as if charmed in the piercing glare of those terrible eyes, stared at Teach while the cutlass was disengaged from his hand. Teach glided toward him, his feet moving as quietly as a cat's, until he was two feet away: his eyes still held the man numb.

The voice came in a horrid, piercing purr. "You got away in Bristol, you spawn of a black betrayer, before I gave you the death you earned. It's dead twice you are, by the Crimps' Rules, an' by the Articles of the Gentlemen of Fortune. You lyin' dog! You told me once you killed Sharp—Bloody Sharp, a freebooter who died of a fever, hell rest his racked bones! You'll never boast you killed me. Here, my friend—taste this!" The horrible whisper chilled all who heard it.

With a shuttling gesture of his hands, the pirate's two pistols were back in their holsters, and the cutlass was in his hands. "So dogs die!" The naked blade whistled up into the air, and came

down with a terrible stroke, that split the man's skull before the horrified eyes of the others.

The Spaniard gave one wild, inhuman moan, and crumpled in his blood to the deck.

Teach stooped enough to wipe the blade on the man's coat, then gave the body a casual nudge with his foot. "Heave the dog over," he ordered curtly. "Any more of your men, Cap'n, wants a taste? No? Not one? An' you call yourself British men! Hark then my word to you."

He gave his demand for the surrender of all arms at once, and listened with open impatience to the Captain's stammering account of the number of crew, passengers, and the tally of the cargo.

"Hardly worth a man's time," he grumbled in restored good humor. "I'll take you an' six passengers on board as hostages, an' tow in the rest under guard."

Elton found something of the man in himself. "Where are you taking us?"

"To my good friend Governor Eden, of Carolina. There your ship'll be condemned, an' you may build your own to return in."

"May I——"

"You may batten down your damned hatches, an' if I hear one word more from you, up the plank you go," the pirate roared suddenly. "Batt Roberts, you're in charge with six men; Hands, pick out half a dozen passengers to ride the *Revenge* in."

“Aye, aye, sir.”

As the man addressed as Hands hesitated, Folly, who had crept close enough to overhear everything, whispered to the Captain, “Take me and my maid, Captain Elton, as two of your hostages.”

“No, no——”

But Hands had overheard the whisper, and saw his task of selection lightened by two. He ordered the girl and Hannah to descend at once to the pirate’s boat, and the Captain to follow. Four other passengers were secured—the Countess discreetly stayed out of sight, so was not included—and the boat, with Black Teach at the bow, was rowed over to the imposing ship which flaunted the black banner.

A wild notion had entered Folly’s head, as she first heard Blackbeard’s demand for hostages. He had not recognized her, that was certain; he would never dream of vengeance pursuing him in the person of a mere girl. If she could get close enough to him, on his own ship, she could lay hands on a weapon somehow, and pay him in person for what he had done to Will—who might, for all she knew, be now where that poor Spanish sailor was. Keeping her face as far as possible away from Teach’s scrutiny, she climbed up the ladder to the pirate decks, and was assigned by Hands to a cabin with Hannah. They were the only two women on board; but, at least, the other ship was at the end of the towrope. Somehow she

knew that she would face down any emergency that might arise.

She disfigured her beauty as much as possible, when she reported to meals, having her hair dressed awkwardly, and her face made down toward homeliness. So far, Teach had paid no attention to her. She made it her business at all moments to learn the ship; most of all she kept her eyes open for a weapon, as well as for some fit place to surprise the dreaded leader, and satisfy her debt from him.

Wilder thoughts crossed her mind: why should she not become the pirate captain herself, with Blackbeard out of the way, and do as many a disgruntled gentleman had long done? This was before the time of Mary Read and Anne Bonny, who did what Folly dreamed; but her fancies ranged on to a courteous pirate empire, with herself as its suzerain.

By the second day, she had discovered that all was not well on Blackbeard's ship. Queerly enough, she was one of the causes—she and Hannah. She overheard two separate groups berating the leader for his mercy to the captured passengers and crew, and for allowing a woman on board, even as hostage. One of these was led by that Hands who had selected the cabin for her; and, as he and four others were grumbling bitterly under their breaths about the situation, Teach came upon them. It was on the forecastle, and

Folly crouched behind one of the boats slung beside the bulwarks.

“Why ain’t you bloody shirkers at your work?” their captain roared at them.

The faces, Folly noted, blanched at the man’s words. But Hands put what face he could on it. “This is reg’lar, Capting. This is a council, this is. Rules.”

“Fo’c’sle council,” supplemented another apologetically.

“Foc’s’le hell! This ain’t a pirate ship, an’ don’t you forget it! We’re a gov’ment ship, we are, a bloody gov’ment ship sent out by the governor to get prizes. No foc’s’le councils goes on gov’ment ships, not while I’m Capting, lawfully elected.”

“We fly the Jolly Roger——”

“We’ll fly what I damned please, without lip o’ yours, Israel Hands. Besides,” and Blackbeard smirked proudly, “the black flag is the new flag o’ Carolina, by Gov’nor’s orders. But speak up, men—what’s your trouble? I’ll always listen, before I eat blood.”

Despite the ferocious scowl, Hands was not daunted. “The capting an’ passengers an’ all of the *Royal James*—they didn’t walk the plank; an’ Rules——”

“No more they didn’t, blast your imperdent scuppers; an’ you want to know why? Who’s got a agreement with Gov’nor Eden, I asks you that?”

Who's agreed not to kill English crews an' passengers, unless in self-defense? I asks you that! Who's makin' every bloody son of a Jolly Roger of us richer as bloody kings? I asks you that! You, Israel Hands? You, Batt Roberts? I asks you that!"

"Oh, we ain't denyin'——"

"It's Teach — Teach — Bloody Teach — Devil Teach—Blackbeard Teach! By Gatt, I'll bust a marlinspike against the pate of the first son of a bloody sea-cook starts to denyin' what I say! If you don't like it, I'll put you over in a boat, now an' here; or, when we reach port, you can go where you damned well please. But while I'm Capting——"

"If the crew don't like it, Teach, if the crew don't——"

"Damn the crew; we ain't piratin' this trip, I tells you!"

"Yaas," the man called Batt Roberts held up the stump of his left hand and pointed it toward the leader, "an' Article Six, Teach? What about that?"

"Oh hell, oh Davy Jones, oh—oh—oh—— I'll go mad, I tell you, an' eat the stinkin' heart out o' your foul body, that I will, if I hear any more silly vermin spoutin' Rules at me. Don't I know the Rules? Didn't I help draw 'em up? Ain't I keep 'em, on any piratin' cruise? Article Six, the man says: 'No boys or women to be allowed amongst

them.' Amongst who, I asks you that? Amongst King's men? Amongst Gov'nor's men? I asks you that, shiver your gaffs for a gar-blooded sea-lawyer. As for those women——" he paused significantly, and Folly had a sudden mad fancy that his eyes lingered shrewdly upon the very boat that concealed her, "—don't you worry; before I finish with 'em, you'll find 'em where every woman's got to be put!"

"That's all right, Captin'——"

"I finish this cruise," he ignored the interruption, "and then you may say what you want to, if you dare. But don't you prate Rules at me, or I'll turn devil himself, an' make a bloody burnin' hell out o' this ship you'll never know tomorrer out of. Put that in your stinkin' pipes an' smoke it!"

With this, he strode villainously away. The others, cowed by the outburst, distrustful of each other, scattered slowly to their tasks.

Well, Folly reflected, at least the pirate was something of a bully, to keep these other men in order. He was, after all, their black shield now.

Two nights later, she had another sight of Teach's humor. She had stolen away, after supper, for a rummage in an empty bunk beyond the bulkhead at the end of her room; she had already located the captain's cabin as the room beyond. She crept into the deserted cabin, and pulled the door to for greater security. In the murk she

searched every corner of the foul place; nothing resembling a weapon was in reach.

Disconsolate, she was about to leave, when she heard feet stamping into the adjoining room, which was Teach's. Perhaps she could overhear what was said. She crept close to the further bulkhead, to find her eye blinded by a sudden ray of light. She shrank abruptly back, and the brilliance disappeared. A quick investigation disclosed a knot which had been knocked out; the candle had for a moment had its beam turned full on the hole.

Crouching down, she fixed her eye to the opening, to watch what she could see.

There were four men in the cabin—Blackbeard, Hands, the sour boatswain, and a seaman whom she had not noticed before. The talk was inconsequential at first; all seemed on the best of terms. The boatswain, the oldest man in the group, drifted back in reminiscing to his early days in the Tortugas: he told of caymans, or crocodiles, three-score and ten feet in length and thrice a man's height in width, who caught boars and wild cows, and dragged them under the water; of tortoises weighing three thousand pounds, that took six men two days to cut up, once they were caught; of unmentionable rapine and debauchery.

Folly listened to it all without blanching: were her ears made of more fragile stuff than man's? She resented being fenced even from the gutter,

even though she did not choose to live there forever; and this eavesdropping was part of her purpose on board the somber craft. Her eyes held on Teach in fascination: he sat listening to it all, his fiery black eyes lidded. To her amazement, she soon discovered that his hands were not idle, for all his apparent calm. He was slowly drawing out of their holsters the two lowest of his pistols, just under the edge of the table.

A quick look around showed her that his action was unperceived, except by the fourth man present, the young seaman. With a muttered apology, this man slipped to his feet, and made for the deck. Teach scowled quietly after him, and looked again at the unsuspecting pair remaining. Folly's eyes froze in fascination as he hefted the pistols quietly a couple of times, still out of sight, and then cocked them.

What strange serene murder was she about to witness?

"They was the real gentlemen of fortune," concluded the old boatswain appreciatively, and spat against the wall. "We ain't got such men today, eh, Teach?"

"No," he sneered. "Not many, that is. Here's a little trick I learned in hell, as may make you grin. Watch this!" He leaned forward with a sudden swing, and blew out the sole candle.

"Hey—what in——"

Out of the swirling darkness she saw two spurts

of flame, framed in smoke. A wild scream from one or both of the men, she could not be sure—and men came running, with lit lanterns that washed in gold the room.

There sat Blackbeard, as calm as before, his eyes still lidded, the two smoking weapons in his hands. The boatswain, eyes popping, was scrooged back into one corner; Hands, face twisted by pain, was groaning convulsively, as he held on to his leg.

“Get you?” grinned Teach amicably.

“You black devil, you hit me—— Ugh! Right through the knee. You might ‘a’ killed me!”

“I might,” smiled the Captain, an odd, diabolic pride on his face.

Hands stared wildly out of a chalky face: “What in hell did you do that for?”

Teach gestured in courtly fashion. “You foul by-blows, if I didn’t kill one of you now and then, you’d forget just who I be. Take him out, Roberts—he’s fainted. Have his knee dressed.”

The world would be well rid of such a scoundrel, Folly decided definitely. But what a magnificent calmness in his cruelties! Yes, she must end him, though so far her project seemed as far off of accomplishment, as when it had first flashed into her mind.

Within an hour, she shared the common gossip that the Carolina coast would likely be reached by the next day. She must make one final effort to

find a weapon—any weapon—to carry out her purpose.

With quick eyes, missing nothing, she prowled and rummaged around the ship: no, there was nothing in sight that could aid her. She even drew near where some men were splicing and marling some stray ends of rope, and fingered a marlinspike, momentarily unused. She had heard that seamen used it for a weapon. No, it would be beyond her to do any damage with it.

Supper passed. On the deck again she sprawled disconsolate, Hannah at her side, on a coil of rope, and stared away at the changeless variety of the sea. She had long ceased to look with any interest at the pirates. There was nothing picturesque about them, on second view; only the tawdry dirtiness of their daily lives. Teach did something to look kempt; the rest were utter slovens.

There were three of them now, leeches on to the spritsail-gaff, hand-over-handing the flying-jib hal-yards. She wrinkled her nose in disgust at their foul linen shirts, their smeared linen drawers brown from the blood of slaughtered cattle, their hogskin leggings and sandals, with the rasping hair outward. The boat was kept in fashion as slovenly; gone was the trig air of the *Royal James*, gone utterly the trim vision the pirate boat had presented at first view. In its place was this foul floating nest, peopled with lurching, drunken

bravos, inhumanly roaring from the drink, or sullen as its harvest.

The sea, as ever, discouraged her. With a muttered excuse, she flung herself away from Hannah, and sought her cabin.

To do this, she had to pass in front of the Captain's room. From force of habit, her eyes roved wearily into its candle-lit murk.

Suddenly she stopped, her heart pounding, her breath tight within her. There, on the central table, lay a naked cutlass.

She would get her chance, after all!

With cat-like speed she glanced around; no one in sight of what she was about to do. In tense determination she stepped into the room, to get the blade, and slide it under her skirt. Her hands closed convulsively on the weapon, she began to hide it within the ample folds of her dress. At the same time, she half turned to make her way back to her cabin, and complete her plans there.

Suddenly she froze in her tracks. A voice, bantering, sardonic, spoke out of the shadows at the end of the room. "May I lend you the blade?"

She whirled around, to find the formidable bulk of Teach studying her through the slits of his eyes. His great black beard bobbed up and down, as if in derision. Words failed her. "Oh—— I——"

"Why, what are you tremblin' for, lady? Black-beard's no man to make a woman tremble—for

nothing. You wanted the cutlass to trim your nails, maybe? Or to sharpen a quill? Were that it?"

She sensed the cynic mockery, and ignored it. "I did not know you were here," she affected disingenuity to mask her sudden fright. "I thought—as a memento of the trip——"

He flung himself upon the vast sea-chest against the bulwark. "Since you've come on board, you've sought that little memento, hour by hour, eh? Nothin' else would suit your humor but a sharp blade, eh?" It was no question, that she knew.

"Well, Captain—I didn't think any harm——"

"Oh, I'm sure of you now," he nodded heavily. "You're the girl in Bristol. You stood beside that old alderman, the night he set the watch on me, and drove me to the open sea."

"I have been in Bristol," she temporized. "It was there I was born——"

"I've mulled a bit over the matter—it was that young cockerel I got for the *Black Nan*, weren't it, as got the town on my heels?"

Folly disregarded all pretense. "He was my brother," she said simply.

"Then the sprig weren't lying. I misdoubted he might be tellin' the truth."

"Where is he now?" She took the incisive offensive.

"In Davy Jones's locker, for all I know. Where is my sister now, for what the likes o' he done?"

“I am sure he did naught to her——”

“His kind wronged her, right enough.”

“Does one wrong wipe out another?” she flashed magnificently back.

“Then why were you hefting that cutlass—that memento?” The eyes bored her with the same terrible serenity.

She stared back, aghast at his swift wit. “I pay my debts,” she said daringly.

“I am still payin’ mine. Her body were fished out o’ Thames, it were; your brother’s still alive, I doubt not. Others ain’t.”

She stared at him, troubled.

“What were you goin’ to do?”

“Kill you, if I get the chance.” She gritted her teeth, and bent on him a look that deadlocked his own terrible ferocity.

A sardonic smile grew upon his face, like a mask of horror. He pulled himself quickly to his feet; she half shivered away in fright. His huge hands ripped wide the shirt at his neck, revealing the great hairy, bulging chest, tattooed with strange faded devices clear to the navel. “Then strike, if you’ve got the guts,” he commanded splendidly.

Oh, God! The chance she had longed and prayed for! The fool thought that she lacked courage or strength to see it through. Here was the way, thrust at her. The cutlass caught the glimmer of the candle, as she raised it in air. She held the haft in both hands high above her

head; one blow, and he would never breathe again.

She looked triumphantly in the face of what she was to sacrifice; and something in the eyes held her a moment. They were not closed in dumb resignation: they burned like bale-stars. There was a sneer in them, a sneer on the face, a sneer in the whole bearing of the man.

By God, she would show him!

She braced herself for the stroke: and that was all she did. For her life, she could not bring down the blade.

So they stood frigid, facing one another, for a long, strange, strained pause.

“You are not striking,” he taunted in icy slowness.

“I—— In cold blood——” She closed her eyes, and swayed a trifle.

“Give me the toy. I laid it there for you to find. Get you back to woman’s work—to the needle and the distaff, the oven and the bed, the ballroom and the clip after. Get you to your woman’s trinkety doings——”

“I was weak,” she said bitterly, handing over the sword with face turned sideways.

“So are all women.” He stared at her, considering her carefully.

“I will meet you in fair combat——”

He nodded securely. “Aye, in woman’s usual combat——”

“You mean——”

“—I’ll bed you first, my fine mistress. You will not escape: no woman has, whom I desired. In my own time——”

She came closer to him, eyes smarting. “I could kill you now——”

“A pleasant good night to your ladyship,” and he bowed at her retreating back.

She marched blindly out ahead of him; his hateful chuckle pursued and noosed her. Then a voice chanted from the dimness of the bow ahead: “Land ho! Land ho!”

“The Carolinas,” said Teach pleasantly at her ear. “This means that we postpone our play together.”

“Oh! I could——”

“As I planned,” he explained politely, holding her step to match his own. “You are in my world now; and you will find, when you land, you are still in my world. And now I’ll leave you to your hot red dreams.” A look that scorched her inwardly, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XV

ASHORE

FOLLY did not get further word with Blackbeard, before she went ashore. Not that he was not in evidence: he glowered upon the obeisant world around him like an emperor at his coronation. He stood forth a gallant figure, newly apparelled with a great coat of crimson with bright gold buttons, a rich lemon damask waistcoat and breeches, and a long black feather cocked in his hat. Around his neck hung a massive gold chain, with a cross at its end alternating sapphires and diamonds; his bandoliers were new apricot silk, fringed with gold. The girl felt herself ill-clad beside such splendor.

It was not Teach, but the lamed and limping Hands, who took her and the others held as hostages ashore, through bickering snarls of bum-boats, sloops, Indian canoes, and a tangle of larger rigging. Captain Elton, once landed, took to pacing heavily backward and forward, awaiting the arrival of the boat holding the pirate captain. Folly, not sure whether she was technically freed or not, rested against a weathered post laced with many hawsers; her eager eyes busied themselves watching the blackamoor slaves at work.

As Blackbeard stepped ashore, Elton stalked up to him, half defiant and half obsequious. “—And my ship, Captain Teach?”

“Rest easy on that score, Captain.”

“You mean——”

Hardly a flicker of sardonic mirth on the face, as he answered, “The *Royal James* will be condemned as a prize no later than tomorrow.”

“Why, this is an outrage! I’ll hie me straight to the Governor——”

“Up this long street, then one turn to the left. The servants’ entrance is at the right,” said Teach negligently. He watched the impetuous departure of the commander with a pitying shake of his head. By now the Countess had joined the group, and hovered around Folly as if half afraid to touch her. Teach asked with much civility if he could see them to their destination.

The Countess was of a mind to refuse the offer; but the girl accepted stiffly for the two of them. “You shorten my long task, Captain,” she said straightly.

“Nor delay mine,” he bowed back. “Whom do you seek?”

“Who but Governor Eden, of the Carolinas?”

He marvelled aloud, “So you are bound too for Charles Eden of Edenton—a great man, as men go. Perhaps you go to report the evil pirate, as that will-he-won’t-he Captain of your ship is gone to do.”

“We are to visit him,” explained Folly carefully. “One thing I shall report,”—she lowered her voice and stared unsmilingly at him—“something that happened long ago in Bristol Gorge. Lord it as you will over others; but when it comes to me and mine——”

He bowed sardonically, and spoke to her ear alone. “We will both be his guests. Perhaps we shall meet there—without cutlasses.”

Folly masked her curiosity, seething over the strange presumption that led a notorious law-breaker to the chief magistrate of the land; for the brief journey to the Governor’s mansion, she listened civilly to the vainglorious talk of the black chieftain. Then there before them was the jerry-built colonial office, with a group of elegant gentleman upon the wide steps. The girl picked out at once Captain Elton, talking to a smiling, well-groomed man who must be the Governor.

Teach was ahead of her, however. “Ah, Governor——”

At the harsh salutation, the official turned courteously from the Captain, and came down the steps, eyes dancing his delight. “Well, well, Ed Teach, it’s good to have you back. In your absence, things have simmered considerably—your stern hand is needed with some of these petty water-rats. What sort of voyage did you have?”

Captain Elton, mind made up somehow at last, pushed rudely in front of the pirate. “Governor,

this is the very scoundrel I was telling you of! This is the man who boarded our ship, and committed piracy on the high seas, against King George's flag. Now's your chance—clap him into jail, while he's away from his other bloody rogues!”

Governor Eden stepped gracefully back, and bowed ceremoniously. “Your pardon. Have you met Captain Elton of the *Royal James*, Teach? This is Captain Teach, our right-hand man.”

“I've met him,” the pirate bowed with obvious mockery.

“He's the very scoundrel——”

The easy tones of the Governor somehow flooded out the explosive complaint. “Teach, Captain Elton here has been telling me of an encounter he had with pirates, who robbed him of his ship. Did you note any of the black gentry on your voyage?”

Elton's eyes almost leapt from their sockets. “This is the very rogue, Your Excellency. I indict this man Teach for piracy, and demand that he be jailed at once!”

Eden regarded him as if he had been a strange beast. “But this is extraordinary, Captain! Your misadventures must have gone to your head! Did you suffer a stroke of heat by any ill chance on your voyage over?”

“Why, I tell you, Governor, that that rascally pirate——”

“Peace, peace, sir! We wear more civil tongues in Carolina. Surely your eyes mistake you! This is my good crony, Edward Teach, who is in my very service.”

“Why, I tell you that villain——”

“Tut, tut, sir! You grow monotonous. There is an error here, of course. Isn’t there, Teach?”

“A serious error, Charley.”

“There, there, I was sure of it!”

Elton’s face grew as red as a young beet. “Why, I’d know that foul face anywhere! I demand that you clap him in jail, and send a force to regain my ship——”

“Could I oblige you further,” purred Eden smoothly, “by jailing myself, and sending over a writ against the King? As to your ship, that is simpler. We have royal courts here, who will be glad to give ear to your complaints. Tell me frankly, Edward,” he beamed affably, “did you take this man’s ship, as a pirate?”

“Indeed no, Governor. His boat, wholly dismantled by the storm, was legitimate salvage; beside that, in violating most of the Acts of Navigation——”

“How your words dispel the clouds of ill rumor, Edward! I am immensely relieved.” He turned to Elton smilingly. “You hear what the good, modest fellow has to say for himself, Captain. Take my counsel, sir, and cultivate his friendship.”

“Well, of all the——”

“Governor,” Teach paid no more attention to the disgruntled commander, “here are others who seek you—the Countess of Westport, and her ward, Mistress Folly Leigh.”

“We are indeed graced in your coming!”

Folly, admiration for Blackbeard mingled with her hatred of him, gave him a confused look, and curtsied low before the Governor. “One especial matter drew me to America, Your Excellency. I had a brother—Will Leigh—unlawfully crimped out of Bristol, and shipped here on a vessel called the *Black Nan*; and the man who did it was——”

“Ah, let me think, let me think. . . . Leigh? Will Leigh? Surely that is the sturdy youth that that peppery Lieutenant Maynard, of Virginia, enlisted into His Majesty’s service.”

“Oh—so Chris has been here, too! Then Will is—is safe, you say?”

“Two weeks ago, here in Raleigh, the Lieutenant found him, fit as a fiddle and fine as a flute. You would wish to have word sent to him, I am sure. I will see that it is done, and presently. Countess,” a stately bow, “I am doubly honored in your coming.”

“And I am inexpressibly relieved, at the good news concerning the young maid’s brother.” Her curtsy more than equalled his.

“Ladies, Edward, I am your humble servant. May I see you to my simple woodland dwelling?”

As for you, sir," he turned coldly upon Captain Elton, "the prize court sits at high noon tomorrow. I charge you to save any complaints for it, and not spill meanwhile any careless words reflecting upon any of the loyal servants of His Most Christian Majesty's highly Christian colony." With this pompous benediction, he offered his arm to the Countess, and led off.

Folly, with a slant look at Teach, walked beside him. So it was that they arrived at the Governor's elegant mansion, a palace largely in the Elizabethan style, nestled under palmettos and live-oaks draped in Spanish moss, and with half-naked negro slaves lolling on the great verandah.

There was nothing for Folly to do, but wait until word was carried to Will and Chris, and until they could return. This would take, she was told, a full two weeks. From very boredom, she let herself be driven down to the session of the prize court, high noon of the next day.

The three judges, in bank, made short shrift of Elton's case. The ship and its cargo was awarded without discussion to Teach, and there was an end of it. Folly saw no more of Captain Elton thereafter.

During the afternoon, she sought out the Governor, to get some light on the queer position the outlaw filled in his establishment. She located him at the harbor, where he watched with satisfaction the quick progress of the flames that were

burning the *Royal James* down to the waterline.

“But—is that necessary?”

The harsh voice of Teach startled her at her elbow. “Dead ships tell no tales,” he chuckled.

It was not hard to persuade the Governor to let her walk back from the harbor with him; and she asked frankly as to the strange dispensation that made Teach so high in all that was high here.

“My dear,” the Governor explained in kindly solicitude, “we are a long way from Aldgate and Westminster; and this is a turbulent land I am set to rule over. To the south lie the Spaniards, ever pricking on the restless redmen to descend on us with the scalping flint and the tomahawk. We have runaways from Virginia, from the islands, even from New England. Every man is his own master here, save the Governor alone; and every man feels himself my master. I am bound to all their bickers and frets. What am I to do?”

“But—to collogue with pirates——”

“My colony, named after the blessed martyr whose head fell on Tower Hill, is shot with rivers and creeks; and not a one of them but swarms with those called pirates. I rule an empire of pirates; am I to be the only honest man among them? Would the foxes tolerate a hare as their king? ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’; so I deem every man honest, till a higher word than mine proves the reverse. As for Teach, he is the bloodiest villain unchanged, I verily believe; and withal a fel-

low of utter humor and capacity. I love him; there is something in me—" he tapped his portly chest briskly, "that throbs with all that he does. Here I am, then. I cannot fight off a world of pirates: they are, I verily believe, more than a moiety of my subjects. What would you have me do, in such a parlous case?"

Folly studied his easy-going honesty in some doubt. "You must do one thing or the other, I should hold—either run the Jolly Roger over the Governor's mansion, or face them down till they or you are perished."

He made a deprecatory bow. "We are a young land, yet, dear lady; too young to run the black flag over the house of government. Leave that for full-blown civilizations. As for facing the miscreants with steel and powder, hang it, they have both: and I have small will to sign my own death warrant. So I do neither; I ride both horses, God lighten my sins. I sleep with the moccasins and the field-larks together. Yet hark you my way. This Teach is my man, for all his blood-letting; and, in fair barter, he executes summary justice on any other pirates, who dare interfere with the good planters of my Carolina. I have enlisted the lion's self, to fend me against the wolves and the foxes."

"Statecraft is too devious a course, I fear, for me——"

"Ah, more than statecraft, my child. This

swart scoundrel makes my days and nights pass more pleasantly. You shall see. Tonight, by the by, I am to dine with Squire Ludwell—Gabriel Ludwell, richest save one of the planters in my bailiwick. Will the Countess and yourself make two of our party? It will be coarse, after London; but, any oasis in a desert, you know——”

Folly thanked him for the invitation; and, when the Countess pleaded indisposition from the journey, decided to go, accompanied only by Hannah. Soon after they got under way, she was chagrined to find the black outlaw riding at her side. A query brought out that he was an expected member of the party; she rode on with less pleasure after that. Must she find him crossing her way everywhere she went?

When they arrived at last at the great mansion of Squire Ludwell, the girl was amazed and a little shocked to find that they had not been expected. In fact, the surprised host was already entertaining a house full of notables, including Sir Francis Catton and a party from Virginia. He made the best of it, however; and Folly's observant eyes soon made out that Blackbeard and the Governor had done no less than leech themselves willy-nilly upon the man. Teach called brusquely for what he wished, in the way of refreshments; the amplest service, the choicest imported brandy, was less than he expected.

Under the potent touch of the drink, however,

he mellowed noticeably. Egged on by Eden's good-natured insistence, and the polite interest of Catton and the others, he drifted into reminiscences of his own piratical days, and the earlier years of the giants of the black gentry. He told of the tortures practiced by the southern Indians, who made hedgehogs of their Christian captives with prickles from the prickle-palm, each bearing a wad of cotton soaked in oil; and, as a dessert, set these on fire.

"A true heathen Inquisition," said Eden boisterously; which earned him a glance of hatred from a Catholic lady from Maryland.

Ah, but the Christians were no lambs, Teach boasted on. He told of Caribbee slave-owners who had beat upwards of a hundred of their slaves to death; of gentlemen of fortune who had roasted alive their victims for some whim; and who had forced all the women of a ravished town, married and virginal alike, and burned out the eyes of those that resisted.

Several of the ladies withdrew, upon this account; but Folly sat gravely staring at the man, for all she was conscious that many of his words were sent toward her ear. Her wits busied themselves as to what would be the pirate's end, and how she could best bring it about.

For the night, all of them were quartered in Ludwell Hall. Long after she had retired, she heard the buccaneer's loud, harsh voice gabbing

on, lording it over his hearers. She fell into a troubled slumber at last, as drunken songs took the place of the boastful tales. She dreamt clearly that she was thicketed in a dense lush forest, and felt herself pursued by some great beast. Now the two of them were strangely upon a high portico tangled in stars, overlooking the faint lights of the world; the beast—a great black boar with shining tusk—charged her, as she stood set, dagger in hand, to meet its onrush. He gored at her as she struck: she felt the sharp horn only a great hot tongue, wondrously soft, and could not tell whether her descending blow held dagger to strike, or was opened to caress. In this shaken uncertainty she woke, to find morning upon her.

Later, as she waited the coach for the return, Teach swaggered up and presented his host with a scrawled paper.

“What is this, sirrah?” said Ludwell, not deigning to read it.

“Merely my statement of a defensive levy upon your squireship, and a pleasure impost for the honor of my company. The total is a hundred sovereigns.”

“It shall not be paid,” Ludwell grated back.

“Good. Your house will be torched before the week ends, I give you my pledge on it.”

“I cannot pay it, man!”

“Then you can build another house.”

At length he yielded to the inflexible extor-

tioner; and Teach rode blithely on ahead. Ludwell, face inflamed and hardly restrained, turned to Eden, who stood enjoying the scene.

"I had sworn, Charles," he spoke quietly, albeit with an effort, "that the last should be the last time I threw open my house to that ungodly fiend. See what you have brought upon me!"

"The other pirates do not bother you, Gabriel——"

"What has he left for them to bother?" He spoke with swelling bitterness. "For the last time I demand that you shut our coasts to him, if you will not have him drawn and quartered—which is more than Christian mercy."

"Reason extends so far, and no further. He is our sea-watch——"

"Well. If you will not act, there are those that will. I am not alone in this insistence, you know well——"

"There is naught I can do, and you know it."

"There are others that will act, then."

"I am vicar of the noble owners in my Carolina——"

"And there are majesties above you, and above the drunken owners," said Ludwell hotly. "I bid you good day."

Eden rode away, no whit troubled by the cloudy threat. "They take his exactions hardly, Mistress Folly; but the choler will die, and they will be grateful to Edward Teach in the end. Tomorrow

night we ride to my own neighborhood, along the Chowan. May I show you that country as well?"

"Teach goes along?"

"But surely!"

"I thank Your Excellency for the thoughtfulness. But the long trip—a general fatigue——"

He bowed, unruffled. Nor did Folly accompany the Governor on that night, or thereafter, as long as Blackbeard was in the colony. Better immure herself like a nun, than share the contagion of his society. It was evil enough to live in the same house with him, indeed, the same world with him. Oh, if Chris were only here—or Will: either of them would know what to do. She could not strike him down in cold blood, though she would have dared the attempt, for all his formidable name. But somehow there must be a way by which she could engineer his destruction.

And then, one morning, he was missing from the Governor's table.

CHAPTER XVI

NEWS FROM VIRGINIA

A GUARDED query to one of the members of the Governor's staff let Folly know that Blackbeard had taken to the sea again. She breathed more freely. It had been two full weeks now, and no word had come from the loved two in Virginia—her brother, and her plain-spoken young protector along the London road. She began to fidget at the lack of word; the Governor teased her by his silence, when she asked him of them.

Three more days passed, and the girl was almost frantic at the lack of news.

"If I do not hear by tomorrow," she cornered the colonial official as he came in from riding, "I shall take horse and make for Virginia myself."

"The project is a fair one," and Eden eyed her twinklingly. "But I have news at last."

Her hands clenched on her breast, then clasped his arm in entreaty. "Tell me—do not twist my heart with this further suspense!"

"There are travellers in the parlor from Virginia," said His Excellency casually, "who bring some word."

Folly turned, vexed profoundly at his keeping her thus on tenterhooks. She raced down the hall

toward the room—she would have news of her own at last! Then something stilled her steps: what if the news were not good news? Heart fluttering with uncertainty, she pushed wide the door, and entered.

The room was curtained heavily; in the obscurity she saw three men at the farther end, in earnest talk. Which of them—— Her eyes strained wide in unbelief: those shoulders looked familiar——
“Chris!”

At the cry of joy, he swung to meet her; she could not refrain from hurling herself into his arms. “My dear Chris! How wonderful to see you again. They merely told me— Any news of—?”

The slighter man beside him had come up unnoticed. “Any greeting for me?”

It was Will, after all these months. She disentangled herself in a flurry from the first impetuous embrace, and caught him into her arms. Then she pushed him back, and held him off for a careful scrutiny.

“Why, you’ve grown into a man, Will, in less than a year! You’re taller, taller than I, and heavier—your face is more sober——”

“No one but a man could have lived through what the boy had to suffer,” said Maynard simply. “You’ll have him tell you all the long story——” He stopped abruptly, then blurted out, “My, but you are a vision!”

“The city rose, pining in the country air,” she deprecated demurely.

“How did you leave Westport and the rest of England? I heard of your splendid words with the King——”

“Pish, ’twas less than you did.”

“Did you get the news you sought?” The Governor, eyes crinkling, stood in the door.

Will stepped forward with a bow. “I cannot thank you enough, sire, for the care you took of my sister.”

“No man living could do less than his utmost.” The Governor’s face altered its glance of admiration at the girl, to harden a trifle. “Now, touching the matter you spoke of——”

Maynard gestured toward Folly briefly. “Should the girl be excused?”

Eden shook his head decisively. “She’s twice the man you or I am, Lieutenant. Nor have we any secrets in Carolina councils. Let her stay. Touching this complaint against Captain Edward Teach——”

“Call him Blackbeard, or the fiend, or what you will, and be done with it,” interrupted Will sharply. “A captain of pirates, colloqued with the Governor of His Majesty’s overseas dominions!”

“You see,” the Governor turned in mock dismay to Folly, “they come at me at once, in this uncivil fashion, against my own chief of the sea-watch.”

“More shame to you, sire,” said Chris sternly. “When the complaints of your own best citizens go unheard, and they have to appeal to His Excellency of Virginia——”

“Alex Spottswood has much on his hands, to give ear to every stray gust of gossip exhaled by some worthless wastrel!”

“Governor Eden, you cannot hide the foul matter behind scoffing words. The complaint is universal; and I bear you more than Governor Spottswood’s request that you preserve order in your dominions, and rid them of this pestilential fellow.”

“I had as well turn Mexican, and eat dog, as turn on my friend. But out with your word, young man.

“Either execute summary justice at once upon this Teach, or——”

Will Leigh cut in, with sparkling ardor: “Or Virginia will see to it that the scoundrel is hung as high as her tallest pine-top!”

Eden drew back a step; his lips curled. “I pardon your plenitude of zeal, young sprig, for your plenitude of youth. You prate mere blether: any zany knows that each colony is sovereign within its own borders, and no farther.”

“This is the word of Governor Spottswood,” said Maynard bleakly. “Unless you pledge him your name that you will satisfy these bitter murmurs, he will rid the coast and the seas of this

blackguardly vermin, and now, upon his own motion.”

“And if I refuse to stand idly by, and see my own man persecuted by this bystanding dandy from Virginia——”

“The worse for you, Charles Eden of Edenton, if you value your peace and your pate.”

The Governor’s face worked heavily; an outright quarrel seemed inevitable. Folly was all on fire to see the scene through; meditating how much better she could have conducted it than either the testy, courteous Governor or his zealous young opponents.

But Eden did not speak. Instead, he took a slow turn about the room, stepping with heavy precision. When he came before them again, there was a strained smile on his face. “I am sure that Governor Spottswood will repent of this uncivil word. I send him my kindest greetings.”

“And—and that is all?” marvelled Maynard.

“All.” Eden’s face hardened into stone. “And I warn the man who meddles with Ed Teach to think twice and once again, before he crosses the tallest man this side of the Atlantic, if not in all Christendom. He is no puppy, to be drowned in a sack, I warn you.”

“Pharaoh of Egypt was no puppy, yet for all that the Red Sea did not spare him,” said Will grandly.

“He had no *Queen Anne’s Revenge*,” said the Governor drily.

At this retort Folly laughed, and the spell of the altercation was shattered abruptly. With much civility the Governor pressed the young messengers to stay for the evening meal.

After the ample dinner, the three reunited ones sat on the great verandah, drinking in the balmy Carolina air, as they told over what had transpired during the long separation. When they were all satisfied, Folly answered Chris’s impatience, by sending Will off on a complicated errand for her. When her brother was gone, and the two of them were at last alone, a quietness fell upon them. Folly sensed what must be said; and, for all that she did not know how she would answer his importunities, she did not flinch from the utterance of the problem.

His voice was low when at length he spoke. “It is the same moon,” he said soberly, “that shone over Bristol Gorge, the night you first came under the roof that sheltered me. We have travelled a long way from Bristol, Folly.”

She meditated, without answer.

His voice, stronger now, flowed on. “We are out of favor now with those who hold the reins of the world.” After a pause, “Both of us.”

“We hold the reins of our own world, Chris, or we are unworthy to cumber it.”

“My world cannot be another world from yours.

I have seen you constantly before me, every league of the long sea way."

"I believe you," she said somberly. "But I have not seen you so, Chris—— Not that another face has meant anything to me. I love slowly, it may be."

"Men love from the eyes; women from the soul. Our desire goes inward; yours must push its way from the heart of hearts. I will burrow in to meet yours, if you will come outward ever so little toward me——"

"Oh, Chris, if I could only know my own mind! Ah, but I do, on one matter. How wholly I am yours, in your brave effort to stamp out that villain who took Will from me."

"I did not tell the all to the Governor," he explained in eager confidence. "I myself am to go after him, I trust, in two sloops, if Eden does not yield!"

"You luckiest of mortals! And Will——"

"Goes too. Nothing could keep him away."

"I have a recruit for you——"

"Good!"

Very quietly she smiled it out: "—Myself."

"Where do these madcap notions come from, most adorable of women! It's impossible, of course."

"Nothing in life is impossible, Chris, if the will is there."

He shook his head soberly. "Time will cure

that philosophy. Seek any goal, and you will win something, but rarely the goal you bend toward. Bethink yourself! We are in the King's navy, Folly, on the King's business; it is unthinkable to take you along."

"Disguised as a man——"

"Mad, mad, mad!"

"Chris," she shook a worried head, "sometimes I almost hate you for your complacent certainty. What are laws for, if not to be broken by those who shine across the crest of the world? I tell you I hate that man with a hatred that will last his life out. I will be there, that I know," she leaned forward tensely, "when his life ends. How, then, can you refuse me?"

"Beloved Folly, how can I do aught else?"

"This is your last word?"

"There is no other possible."

"Well—— But I will be there, have no doubt."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed in soft confusion. "I am not wholly sure myself. Sometimes determinations speak themselves, before the means is born. But it will come to light. Oh, Chris, Chris, how can Governor Eden tolerate him a day?"

"Worse than that, Teach can never hold faith with Eden, or any man. He tricked his own crew out of their vile gains, soon after I came to the colonies—beached his own ship on Topsail Inlet of a purpose, and made off in a sloop with the

treasure, with the men marooned behind. Later, he secured his ship again. He is a vast mountain of cruelty and bloodshed and treachery. Let you face such a man? Folly, I love you too deeply—”

“When he is no more man, then, dear Chris, tell your love to me; I will have room in my heart then to listen to it. Now hate crowds the very walls. At least this—may I go to Virginia with you and Will?”

“If you wish to, yes: we leave tomorrow, and take ship at once against the pirate. We would have to leave you behind, there. . . . Or, when we have rid the seas of him, we will come get you here.”

Her mind flashed another decision. “Here I wait, then, my lord: and, with all my hatred in the scale with you, you cannot fail!”

On the morrow, after this brief and unsatisfactory reunion, the two travellers rode off again for their return to Virginia. Folly’s last request to Chris, that he reconsider his denial, had achieved nothing; she did not show it in her farewell, but she was storming within.

No sooner had they passed out of sight than she secured a saddle horse, and, accompanied by one of the Governor’s attendants, rode off toward the south. When she was out of sight of the houses, which was soon enough, she put her horse at a gallop, careless whether her escort kept up or not. Mile after mile she made in this fashion, while the

man followed her like a shadow. She bade her mind go blank, to relieve her of the ignominy of remembering how her will had been thwarted.

At last the road tapered off to a way through the vast forest of long-leaf pine that stretched southward as if endlessly. The keener sting worn off now, she let the horse pick his own way, while her thoughts came in some order.

Why was she not satisfied, since this well-manned expedition was starting to end the bloody sea-scurge? It was not fair to her, first of all. She was shrewder than Will, that she knew; more daring, or, at least, more able to take care of herself in a tight situation. She was more daring than Chris. And because she was a woman, of all silly reasons, what was their right was denied her wholly. Blackbeard preyed on women, as on men; why, in the name of fairness, was a woman mured away from the red scorpion of retribution?

That was not all, nor the half of it. They knew little of Teach: Chris had never seen him, Will had only known him in the crimps' den in Bristol. She had been cooped on the same boat with him, had seen him in his daily dealings with the Governor, at his night's revel with the unwilling planters. Especially on shipboard, with his men and in that tense encounter in the cabin, she had studied his quickness of wit, his ruthless disregard of all the points of honor that badged the gentleman—at least, the gentle breed that she dreamed

of. She alone knew what was to be faced and conquered: they, unarmed by her first-hand knowledge, were children playing with culverin. It was unfair, unfair!

What could she do? Provoke a quarrel now, as soon as each returned to port, and so prevent his meeting the royal navy? But—in single combat, there was no surety that she could overcome the pirate's immense strength and quickness. One did not fight forest fire with a lady's fan. With a revolver she might meet him: again, she was a tyro, he an expert, at this.

She left the problem to simmer within her, and turned her troubled blue eyes to the marvelous Carolina valley she was passing through. Her horse came to a slight river, perhaps a creek, and commenced to ford it daintily. Folly stopped him midway, to drink in the wonder of the scene. The waterway was cloaked from the immensity of the piny woods by a thick matting of live oak, sweet gum, and bald cypress, looped and festooned with that fantastic drapery she had heard called Spanish moss. At the base of the tree-boles were masses of mountain-laurel and swamp azalea in their late blooming; vast green sunbursts of the great cinnamon fern crouched below these, and on the strange sward between the fern and the double-crested cat-tails were strange small flowers writhing, and, indeed, hued like red-bellied snakes.

She rode the horse straight up the right bank,

crash through a great thicket of laurel. Behind her she heard the protesting sigh of her attendant, hard at his reluctant following.

After a brief stretch of piny woods, she suddenly turned the horse's head toward the right, and made in a straight line for the settlement—not following the curving way she had come, but in the line of a crow's dark flight. Why she had started back, she did not know for a moment: and then the conviction grew upon her that she had found the answer; that she knew, or held just below knowing, what she must do. An intuition, perhaps, whirling in dislocated fashion just behind clear vision—this had come to her. She would see it soon, that she knew.

Again she drew up above the stream she had crossed—but it was a wide stretch here, with no ford.

At the moment that the stream appeared, she suddenly saw clearly, for the first time, the wild way in which she would do what she willed to Blackbeard, in spite of all the Wills and Chris Maynards in the world! Her heart was jubilant: she set her horse at a run down the slope, bidding him jump the expanse of waters.

Sharply he turned, at the water's edge, and smashed into a copse of fox-grapes, sumach, briers and what not. Eyes flashing furiously, she backed him back upon the way, and prepared to set him at the water again.

“You can’t make it,” said her silent guard firmly.

“Why not?”

“You—a lady——”

The day, to her half-closed eyes, turned scarlet shot with black. “You will see,” she gritted out.

This time she galloped the horse down the bank with a punishing tenseness of rein. She edged forward, till her head lay against the horse’s, and she was almost upon his neck. “Do it!” she ordered fiercely, pulling back sharply on both reins at the very moment that the horse started to turn again.

For a moment he trembled, as if about to refuse: then, making the most of what was expected of him, he sprang from the yielding turf into the air. As the steed, muscles tense, left the earth and trod the air, her heart almost broke with the loveliness of the place and of the deed half done. She might fail, but, God witness, she had tried! There was a bewildering kaleidoscope of bickering water frothing over great smooth black stones, of pebbles and green reeds, of the bank rising up to meet her, and then the horse had landed. For a moment he trembled, all four hoofs delicately poised on the edge of the farther bank. Then the bank itself crumbled beneath his feet.

One wild lunge placed his front feet in a further niche of safety; his back legs clawed dreadfully at the moist gray earth. It happened too quickly

for thought: one moment she knew that she was falling, falling to the wet uncertainty beneath; the next, with a mighty heave, almost throwing her over the horse's head, to which she was clinging for very life, the horse completed the leap, and stumbled to his knees on firm soil.

Wholly shaken by the experience, she slid off the saddle, and cooed encouragement to the frightened animal. Panting, he rose to his feet. At this moment the other horse, with serene unconcern on the face of its rider, made the leap that had almost ended her.

Her smile of astonishment met his slow, friendly grin. "You made it," she said.

"I'm a man," he explained. Then, as if wiping this out of his memory, "But you made it."

She rode slowly back to the settlement, her head whirling far above earth. She had done it: and at the moment she dared it, she knew that this was a test. If she could do this leap, she could do the wilder exploit that she had in mind. Oh, it was insane, dangerous in the highest degree—folly in the highest. But she had made the leap: she would dare that other!

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK SLOOP SAILS

FOR a few days Folly went about in a dreamy state, perfecting her plans. Teach was still away; yet time would be, soon enough, when he returned; and she must be ready. Then the morning came when he returned. A shrewd placing of gold kept her informed of his plans: in three days, she learned, he went to sea again. Little enough time to finish what she wanted; yet, with the aid of Hannah, she accomplished it. Bundles of queer sizes were conveyed by stealth into her room, odd purchases were made in odder places.

The day before he was to sail, Folly spent indoors, closeted with Hannah, strangely busied.

About dusk, a figure, obviously that of a rather slender youth, slipped out of the Governor's mansion, and walked rapidly away in the direction of the harbor. The few encountered in the gloom were struck by the swarthy tan of the face, the leather skullcap with its pert peak in front pulled low over the forehead, the faded linen shirt and blood-dyed drawers, the sandals and leggings of bull's hide, hair worn outward, and even the brace of pistols hung from a bandolier above the ancient cutlass. Those who passed gave the youthful fig-

ure a wide berth: clearly, this was one of the ill-favored pirate gentry, returning from his evil business with the Governor to his blood-stained decks.

With an insolent swagger, the figure lounged up to the crew of the beached jolly-boat that belonged to the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. "Cap'n Teach aboard?" In a brusque query of command.

"Down at the *Black Imp*—the sloop," a man answered civilly, pointing to a smaller vessel, ship-rigged, riding at anchor nearer the shore.

"Row me over," in a crisper order. "He expects me."

The man's respect increased. Unhesitatingly he slid his solitary oar into its stern rowlock, and beckoned the other to take the bow seat. "He's sailin' tomorrer, ain't he?" in an eager attempt to secure further information.

"At sunup. So he said."

The man sculled with powerful strokes through the tangle of shipping, and came within close hail of the *Black Imp*. He raised his voice in a sing-song. "Cap'n aboard? Man to see him."

"There's the ladder," from an invisible voice above.

A small coin, gratefully received by the emergency ferryman, and the figure had clambered up the rope ladder, and was on the decks of the sloop. A huddle of men sprawled against the starboard backstays.

“Where’s Teach?”

“In his cabin, I suppose. Reckon he’s on the mizzen-top?”

Paying no attention to the careless jibe, eager steps hastened to the cabin. Without ceremony the door was flung open, and the brusque young voice stabbed out again. “You’re Teach. Good. My name’s Hal Sawkins. What’s the chance of joining your crew? I learn you’re to sail soon—”

Teach, his coat off, pistols laid aside, pushed by the flagon of brandy on the table, and stared for a long silence at the young face fronting him. “Your name’s Hal Sawkins, you say?”

“Ay.”

“Where from, maybe?”

“A bloody Lancashire man I were. Crimped to Barbados. Sailed to Virginia. Wanted there by the Governor—I had to lay out a man. Borrowed a horse, an’ came to Carolina. Now I’m here.”

“Sawkins—a good name for a gentleman of fortune; it was at Puebla Nueva old Brandy Sawkins was killed, weren’t it? You know our Articles?”

“About what they be, I know.”

“Quartermaster’ll tell ’em over to you. These I’m strict on: No prey, no pay. Every man equal, at voting or sharing, except lawfully elected officers. No gaming at cards or dice for money. Lights out after the second dog-watch; any drinking after that to be done on open deck. No boy or

woman allowed on board. Will you follow these, Hal Sawkins—all of 'em?"

"I'll do a man's best——"

Teach smiled affably. "For minor offenses, we slit the ears and nose of the guilty, and maroon them; the man who brings a woman on board is fitly altered; and the woman is the captain's, to use as foul as he will. After such an one has had her turn served, she is usually killed the Portuguese way, or else tortured redman-fashion. You choose to agree to this?"

The swarthy face staring back at Blackbeard's did not alter. "I came to join you."

"Well, Hal Sawkins, here's many a thousand pounds to your share, and girls to spoil in every port! There," a fumbling gesture indicated the flagon, "wet your pipes in pledge. Brewed brimstone, eh? A man's drink. . . . Go give your name to the Quartermaster——"

"Hands?" asked the other, incautiously.

"Israel Hands is no more man of mine. See Batt Roberts, and have him start you."

So it was that Folly Leigh joined the crew of Edward Teach, the night before the *Black Imp* sailed. She knew that she took her name in her hands, and her life as well; but with the gate shut by Chris Maynard, she saw no other way to do what she must against the pirate chieftain. This was a new Folly Leigh: hair snipped man-fashion, her whole body stained with the juice of the wal-

nut, she felt that nothing could give her away. She would sleep, of course, in all her clothes, as the other pirates did; only the wildest accident could reveal her. A dirk, swinging on a cord beneath her shirt, would be her final answer, if that occurred.

Down the sluggish Pamlico at sunup the sloop sailed quietly. Nothing stirred upon the waters, except an occasional pelican or teal. At Marsh Point Teach and three others went ashore. After half a day, he came back with the others, carrying himself a bundle wrapped in stained canvas under his arm.

She watched the captain as he slung the bundle to one of the seamen, and bade him fix it fast to the bow. Folly was called back to help raise the main royal. Curiosity drove her to see what new figurehead Blackbeard had secured while ashore. She looked casually over the railing, the first chance she got; her heart almost stopped for a moment, as she saw what hung there, still dripping red mementoes against the bow—a human head, newly severed.

A good thing she was facing forward, or her swift disorder would have been observed. For a voice came from just behind her: “Sawkins——”

She turned slowly, to meet Teach’s slow, sneering gaze. “A little lesson in the Articles. That man deserted the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* two months ago. They caught him, and held him for

me here. A cutlass makes a clean job, doesn't it?"

"It betters an army sword," Folly retorted, back in her rôle of pirate.

As she passed aft, she told herself that she must school her fancies more. So troubled was she at the necessity for constantly guarding her secret, that she was becoming obsessed with the idea that Teach had a suspicion of the matter. She knew it was only her fancy: yet such fancies, unchecked, could breed what they feared.

So she reasoned away her worry. Yet the impression grew still on her that he stared at her a trifle too knowingly, whenever he looked her way. She had watched his gaze on others, and had noted nothing of the same cryptic twinkle. Only her imagination, she reminded herself sharply. She must not let it make her so nervous that she betrayed herself, by some quick, false motion.

The sloop beat easily down the Carolina coast, taking advantage of the island breakwaters guarding Core and Bogue Sounds, and only coming out into the bay at Bogue Inlet. Once in Onslow Bay, a gentle head wind compelled her to tack in leisurely fashion past the numerous inlets of the coast. As Topsail Inlet was neared and passed, Folly sensed the mutterings of the crew. For all that the sloop's lessened company was hand picked by the captain, the sight of the spot where he had violated the Articles so flagrantly reminded them

that, as he had done, he might well do again. Roberts himself led a group who slouched into Teach's cabin, where Folly and another young seaman sat with him at cards—for sport merely, remembering the Articles. Egged on by Roberts, these men raided the brandy chest, as was their right, while Teach looked on sullenly.

When they lurched out, half drunk, to the deck again, he turned bitterly to the girl. "So it is when the mob rules, Sawkins: the king is gelded."

He sat morosely drinking, paying small heed to the fall of the cards. From time to time he spat out some hatred of the crew's rule. "They would depose me, if they dared," he growled twice. After a long pause, "Unless a king is the fiend enfleshed, they will always depose him. Charley lost his head," he wept into his brandy; and again sorrowfully, "Poor Charley lost his head. I were ever a Jacobite," he apologized vaguely.

"Others lost their heads for that deed," the young seaman consoled.

"If I had my will," the Captain chuckled horribly, "I would call all hands on deck, and at one flail of my cutlass sever the heads from the bodies, and ride back to port with these trophies stretching from fore-truck to mizzen. Let the hands run the ship then; they have no need o' heads—empty as they are."

"Not our heads," said Folly playfully.

“Yours first of all; yours first of all. Yours I shall take, Sawkins, in good time, as my name’s hell-hound!”

“You must be a fiend,” and the youngest seaman crossed himself hurriedly.

Teach started abruptly from his seat, kicking his stool back against the wall. With one sweep of his arm, he sent cards, candle, counters flying, driven against the wall of the cabin. He backed against the wall, his teeth unfleshed, his face grimacing terribly: he looked more than insane—like some dreadful, mindless monster of destruction.

“I am the fiend—and this is Hell!” he shrieked suddenly. Batting the two others to right and left, he strode for the deck, bending and swaying his body from bulwark to bulwark. “Hell! Hell!” he roared wildly aloud. “Who’ll follow Ed Teach into hell now?”

A knot of pirates gathered in amazement around him. “You say I am the black one,” he grinned evilly at them, “and I shall make a little hell in the hold, and see how long you can bear it. Who’ll descend into hell with me—for three days, or three years? You, Batt Roberts?”

The man’s face showed that he feared a trap; but he spoke up sturdily enough. “I’ll go where you go, Ed Teach, an’ further.”

“You, Mackett? You, Will Rose—” picking out two more of the ringleaders of the party who had raided the brandy.

None dared refuse his taunted challenge. At his direction, the Quartermaster brought several huge pots filled with brimstone, oils, and other slow-burning matter.

“Farewell,” he shrieked to the others, as he herded his reluctant victims down the ladder. “We go into hell—the chief fiend and his imps.” There was the sound of the hatches being closed from below, and then a silence.

“Good riddance—if all the bloody fools die,” grunted one man.

“Not Teach,” the young seaman crossed himself again. “The devil can’t.”

There was still the strange hush from below. Then the first wisp of smoke, and another, and another, seeped up through the small cracks beside the unbattened hatches. Soon a dense cloud of oily smoke poured up, sending those above coughing and sputtering back from the place.

“What must it be below!”

“He’ll set the *Imp* on fire, the brainless card.”

“Can hell burn?” said a cynical old veteran, rubbing the spot where his left eye had once been.

There was still quietness from the imprisoned men—a silence broken at last by choked cries for air, and a sound of fists hammering against wood. None dared go near to release them. “Let ’em die,” said the old seaman pleasantly. “We’ll ’lect a new Cap’n—an’, if this hell-craft

does burn, we'll find another gladly, to be rid of that foul 'un."

The noise from below had subsided: Folly knew at last that all of them must be suffocated. So Blackbeard was dead at last, dead of his own folly, and she, and not Chris and Will, had been up when the kill was made!

Then there was a mighty heave, and the hatch came flying. Out of the dull red heart of the black-mouthed volcano climbed a great gaunt, grimed figure, laughing sardonically, immoderately. "Eh, who is the devil now, I says! When the smoke clears off, tote those hulks up on deck, an' douse 'em with bilge water. If they've gone, heave 'em over. The only devil aboard the *Black Imp* is Edward Teach—an' I'll keelhaul the man as says he ain't!"

This lesson hushed all open revolt; although Folly detected subdued mutterings on many sides. When at last the sloop reached Cape Fear, with still no prey in sight, Teach himself seemed uncertain which way to go. For half a day they lolled back and forth. And all the time Folly quietly fanned the embers of dissatisfaction among the crew, and, when she was with Teach, led him subtly into sailing northward.

They anchored at last behind Smith's Island, to mend the riggings. In the lull Blackbeard signalled Folly into his cabin again. "What say you, Sawkins? Southward, or beat back?"

“I don’t know these waters, Cap’n; but I see no sail here, an’ that’s a fact.”

“And there is something to the north’ard, eh? I wonder what it mout be, now? Ye’ve talked north’ard since you came aboard, Sawkins. You know the old jig——

In the South
A filled mouth;
In the North
Death goes forth.

Well, north’ard we go, Sawkins, at your word.” He roared to the boatswain. “Pipe all hands to quarters—an’ yaw her yarely north’ard. We go where the `gold is, men——”

Three rousing cheers greeted the longed-for change. But Folly could not answer the order—the huge bulk of Teach filled the cabin doorway wholly, and threw her into momentary darkness. “I wonder why you choose the north’ard so, Sawkins? Well, time will come round, time will come round.” He slung himself again on his chest. “Sawkins, did you ever spoil a woman?”

Folly blenched a little at the query. “Only once, Cap’n. In Lunnon it were—she was a doxy anyhow, I’ve always thought.”

“Might she come back to ha’nt you, now?”

“Not she; she suffered no whit from it.”

“Ay. When they suffer, Sawkins, it’s diff’runt, diff’runt. I’ve spoiled my tale of ’em. Was a girl

was slipped aboard by one o' the crew at Havana once. We set him ashore on one o' the Dry Tortugas; her they give me, the crew did. It's Articles. 'Twas the cabin on the *Queen Anne's Revenge* I got her in; an' she fell on her knees an' raised her pretty arms to me, she did, an' volunteered to do what I would. If you was a woman, you wouldn't 'a' done that, eh, Sawkins? Now would you?"

Folly stared at him straightly. "Not me, Cap'n."

"No. Well, I pricked her in the shoulder with my cutlass, an' told her I must have her against her will. This cutlass, yes. . . . So I had her. After I'd used these hands on her neck," he flexed and unflexed his brutal paws with a significant smile, "I threw her body on deck, and left the sailors to heave it over. I think they did, a day or so later."

"You're cruel, Cap'n."

"Cruel, eh? Women think so, Sawkins. She come back—come back; I tell you, at midnight, an' stood beside my bunk, all bare an' bloody. 'I ha' come to ha'nt you, Teach,' she told me. An' me—what did I do?" He paused a moment, and chuckled at the grisly thought. "What did I do, lad?"

"You—you weren't afraid?"

"No. I'll tell ye what I did. I did to her shade what I'd done to the flesh. She came no more.

God fend the female, flesh or spirit, that comes near Ed Teach!”

“Ah, we pirates are all alike, eh, Cap’n? Death to men, joy to women, eh?”

“Joy to women—I must make a note of that, an’ use it. Ah, joy to women—that’s our way!”

She left him at last, still deep in his brandy. The sloop bent ever to the north; within half an hour, he had come forth and ordered all the guns to be got in readiness. They rounded Cape Lookout this time, and made toward Whalebone Inlet. That night they anchored near shore, and long before day were on the way again. Somewhere to the north, she knew, was His Majesty’s fleet, bearing Chris and Will southward against the bloody pirate: she determined to keep her eyes wide, do what she could to force the meeting, and stand by to deal what blow she could on the King’s side—or, rather, on Chris’s side.

As Ocracoke Point was reached, the lookout called out, “Sail ho, comin’ from the inlet. Two sails—sloops——”

Folly quickened in interest at this. Now, at last, she would see the pirates in action against some defenseless prey. It would be novel. She leaned over the railing, straining her eyes to see what manner of craft came toward them, to black doom.

She started slightly, as the voice of Teach spoke just at her shoulder, in a tone so low that only she

could hear it. "If I be not mistook, yon boats hold Lieutenant Maynard of His Majesty's fleet, an' your brother, Mistress Folly Leigh."

She closed her eyes in sudden weakness. How could he have guessed! Her breasts were forced by her agony against the woodwork; but even in the moment of utter anguish, she reined herself, and at length turned a straight face toward him.

"So you know, eh?"

"From the minute you stood in my cabin, with your browned face an' your woman's walk, I knew."

"You said nothing——"

"Does the spider quarrel, when the fly steals into the net? The wise man holds his tongue, till it be time to speak. It is time now. You are mine, Folly Leigh: mine you will remain; and a toothsome morsel I'll find you, I've no doubt. Shall I serve you as I served that girl the crew delivered to me? I wonder, I'll be frank with you."

"I have my dirk in my hand, against my heart. One blow, and you lose what you thought to gain."

"You will not strike, my lovely girl: you dare not. Life is too great to you: you will live through all; changed, maybe, but still alive. You're a damned fine ——; I'll wed you lawful, if you say the word, an' go where you will—lording it over the seas, or snug in Carolina, or I'll even brave England again. You're mine: but I give you one word now. Is it yes?"

She thought with terrific speed. She must postpone him somehow, and compass his death. "I am a woman, Captain—this is a heavy problem. You must give me time——"

He looked at her searchingly. "You plan delay, and intend no," he decided shrewdly. "Hate bubbles in your heart. Well, mine you will be, yes or no. When this little slaughter is over, and your brother and lover——"

"Chris Maynard is no lover of mine!"

"I have read your heart, girl; it's his blame if he isn't. When they are sunk in the reddened sea, I will take your answer, and you too. If these are the *Panther* an' the *Electress Sophie*, as I deem they be, one volley will sink both, little as they guess it! Rotted government ships are small fodder for my guns. Then you'll leap to these arms, or, as you leap away—— Hark!"

The lookout's voice again, "Ship ho! Two of George's sloops: the one in front the *Panther*——"

"Ay, the hour is come! Roberts," he called to the surly pirate curtly, "in this short engagement, keep a weather eye on the youth Sawkins here. He has kin in the King's ships; at the first hint of treachery against me or any of our crew, put him in irons, for me to soil later. Now, my lad," he turned brusquely to the shrinking girl, "you're fixed finely; you'd best be loyal to your black lord. Boatswain," his great voice rolled harshly over the water, "call all hands to quarters! Man the

guns—— Death to the scurvy navy, and the black flag forever!”

Dazed with the suddenness of the altered circumstances, Folly saw the crew shed its sloth, and spring with a cheer into action. The *Black Imp* was headed behind the second of the two naval sloops; could Teach plan to run inshore behind them? She could see wild excitement on the two other ships, excitement and confusion. There was—no—yes, it was Chris! She was about to wave a frantic greeting, in her all-forgetfulness, when Roberts stepped closer. “Better be careful, boy.”

Teach had cut in so sharply behind the two boats, that their guns could hardly be yawed back to get the *Imp* into range. Both of the naval boats headed inshore, in order to intercept the pirate.

At that moment Teach shrilled out another word. The *Black Imp* tacked sharply, running along beside the two dishevelled sloops. Her guns commanded the decks of both naval boats. Like a raw trumpet came Blackbeard’s call: “Fire!”

CHAPTER XVIII

INTO THE SEA

GOVERNOR SPOTTSWOOD of Virginia, when he heard from Chris and Will, was outraged at the uncavalierly answer of his brother to the south.

“We’re just setting out on a ceremonial ride to the top of the Blue Ridge; do you two come along. My mind, I must confess, is at the moment crowded with the Frenchers and their papist tricks. But I will ponder how best to answer this insolence from Carolina. I see no way but one now, however—”

“There is but one!” burst out Will Leigh.

The Governor smiled tolerantly: “If any problem were that simple! But the best way, perhaps, is that I send an armed force from the men of war quartered before us, and take or end this foul pirate.”

“Governor! May I——”

“Peace, peace, Lieutenant! All in good time.”

The lowlands were a riot of red gold when the party set forth on horseback. Soft maples burned frantically, sumac and river birch and the deep flare of the sour gums warmed the chill November air. Even higher the holly and dogwood berries echoed the tone. Yet as they mounted, these

altered to the golden brown of oaks against the somber scarf of oldfield pine and hemlock.

Above the last of these, on the naked crest itself, they halted, with the lovely spread of the valley of the Shenandoah spread like sunset below them.

“Steward, to your task!”

Goblet after goblet of costly wines were served each in party. The health of each member of the royal family was drunk, and after each bumper a volley was let loose, toward that rugged west where even now the French were rebuilding the havoc left by Queen Anne’s War.

The Governor called for a final round: an eternal scattering of the French, and death to the pirate who terrorized the English waters to the south.

One by one the glasses were crashed against a scored hulk of granite outcrop. “Now we can return,” the Governor addressed Maynard in friendly fashion. “I know my answer now.”

It was the night of the twenty-third of November, 1718, when the cavalcade rode into Richmond; and at noon of the next day the Governor, in general proclamation, offered a reward of a hundred pounds for Blackbeard, dead or alive. The captain in charge of the fleet was directed to send out a sufficient force to end the menace; and the two swift sloops, the *Panther* and the *Electress Sophie*, were hurriedly fitted out, and, by Maynard’s especial request, were put under his charge.

Will went on the *Panther*, with the commander; and three days later the two ships sailed from Hampton Roads.

Word had come that the pirate was cruising in Albemarle Sound. So down the sheltered seaboard the sloops scudded, their lookouts pricked on by the offer of five pounds for the man who first sighted the gory enemy.

There was no sight of hostile sail here; and a friendly squatter at Kitty Hawk reported that there were pirate craft in the Pamlico.

As the *Sophie* led through narrow Croatan Sound, Will Leigh sought out his superior. "This is the end, I trust, of my long wait," he observed thoughtfully. "Since that night in Bristol, more than a year ago now, I have had nothing in mind but to repay that bloody villain for his existence on this troubled planet."

"It is my vow too, Will, since you and Folly suffered so from him."

"And hers, you tell me. A girl in a sea-fight!" He shook his head in masculine pity.

"I dreamed of her last night, Will. She stood at the top of a great rise of steps that stretched from the water's edge like a pile of triumph. Down the lane of ships—all taller and nobler than the *Panther*, yet all with colors dipped to us—I sailed, and the dripping head of Ed Teach swung bravely from my bows. I sprang to the quay, and mounted the steps one by one—with great blos-

soming rhododendrons and laurels, azaleas and bleeding-hearts to right and left of me. I reached out my arms to her, as one would grope toward a star. And then she smiled, like a star—like the moon riding at full out of a rift in a week's wrack of storm clouds; and I fell on my knees, and laid my cheeks in her two hands. I—I love her, Will."

"I know. So do I. So would I, as you do, if she were aught but sister of mine."

"This dream meant victory, Will—victory on the sea, and, I trust, a dearer victory to follow. He was dead in my dream——"

"But—by contraries——"

"No," and Chris smiled sternly. "Dreams go by contraries, or not, depending on how we make them go. Of course, we've still to catch the water snake, before we slice off his poll. In the Pamlico——"

"The end is near, Chris. I feel as if I could eat raw fiend!"

"That's the temper the windy bully cannot face. Even money I pass the *Sophie* with the first gust of wind!"

Sure enough, in the windier stretch of Pamlico the commander's boat drew up abreast of her consort, and then passed her. After sailing well into Cedar Bay, Maynard decided to make for open water, and aimed toward Hatteras. At the second opening, Ocracoke Inlet, he decided to make passage.

Just before they reached the outer mouth, the outlook called loudly—"Five pounds, and a craft flying the Jolly Roger bears down on us from the offing!"

It was the second time that the reward had been claimed; but a second glance through his glass assured Maynard that this was indeed a ship of Teach's flotilla, although it was not the pirate flagship. Teach might or might not be on board—he watched more closely. Ah, there in the glass was the man himself, unmistakable in spite of the distance, talking to two of his men upon the fore deck.

"You're the best shot, Duffin," in some excitement Chris ordered one of the seamen. "There are three men at the bow. Can you pick them off?"

The third of the three pirates stepped close to his huge chief, to receive some word. At this fair target Duffin shot: but a sudden pitch of the deck sent his bullet whistling feebly through the fore riggings.

Maynard grasped the younger man's arm in excitement. "He's steering behind us, Will, to rake our boat abaft with his broadside! We'll turn in too, and meet him gun for gun!"

A quick command, and the two sloops, the *Panther* leading, began to head for the Carolina shore.

"Stand to the guns!"

Just at the moment the command to fire trem-

bled on Maynard's lips, the pirate sloop, with an indescribably graceful agility, tacked clean to leeward, driving beside and toward the others. Too late the order came to meet the surprise manœuvre. While the sails flapped impotently, for the moment void of air, the *Black Imp* let loose her broadside.

It was the *Electress Sophie* which caught the brunt of the horrid cannonading; but the guns took heavy toll on both. There were screams of the dying and the crippled all around him, as Maynard, in desperation, sought to slue his guns into position. One quick glance behind showed the *Sophie* listing badly, and practically out of commission. The ensign, sent to report, shouted face to face at Maynard: "Twelve dead on the *Panther*, sir." Even the shout could be heard only by reading the youth's lips.

"Ram her," Maynard ordered curtly, seizing the one moment before the pirate craft sailed clear. The ship for the first time woke to what was demanded of her. Her bow crashed into the other's figurehead, nudging the *Imp* out of her course, and for a slow second mating the two boats. Before the inevitable sheer-off, the grappling hooks were out, and the two rivals lay locked for the death struggle.

"Out arms, and over!" roared Maynard. Cutlass and pistol in hand, he made for the railing.

But the fiends of hell were quicker, he thought desperately, as a leaping turmoil broke first out of

the other ship. First of all immense Blackbeard, pistol in each hand, lighted matches sputtering in his hair, vaulted the double railing as if it had been a child's table. The smoke from the pirate fire swirled around him, and magnified him, as if he had been a giant or a djinn stretching to heaven.

His eyes smarting, Maynard dropped to his knees, and aimed his piece steadily at the heart of the leader, whose right pistol bore on him. The two small guns spoke together. Maynard heard the bullet hiss beside his head; but—he had hit! Blackbeard recoiled sharply, gasped, seemed about to fall. Ah, his shot had winged the giant, gloated Chris to himself.

The pirates discharged a cannonade of pistols at the naval men; this fire was returned as briskly. Cutlasses clashed metallically from all sides. Maynard, in the midst of the fighting, considered the situation coolly. With his twelve men gone, he had a bare dozen left; there seemed twice as many pirates. Well, what were odds but a bugle-call to men? Flailing right and left with his cutlass, he drove at Teach.

The giant's blade came crashing down, at the moment the lieutenant brought his sword into play. A taut parry with his own mighty muscles, and the pirate steel was deflected. At the same moment, Maynard lunged. This was parried: and it was smash, parry, smash again, up and down the slippery deck, neither giving ground but in a feint.

For all Blackbeard's superior size, night after night of drunken carousal had dulled his commanding wit and slowed his muscles: and Maynard, after the first interchange of blows, knew that he was at the top of his speed and power, and that this was a match for the black water-thief.

Youth and fitness began to tell; Blackbeard was slowly driven back to the railing. Lunge after lunge from the lieutenant's blade flicked dangerously close to the pirate's face, his sword arm, his heart; in some desperation Teach sought a side escape. There was none.

He whirled his cutlass above his head for a tremendous stroke, that would have cloven a man from brow to navel. From a low stoop Maynard lunged at the very moment the other's stroke descended. There was a wrenching shock as metal met metal, and the lieutenant felt his blade shiver and break in his hands, and go clattering down the deck like a drunken man.

Stupidly Teach stared a second too long at his disarmed enemy, then rushed in to end him. Maynard was out of reach, deliberately falling upon his knees to cock his second pistol.

Well, Blackbeard would end this now! With a roar of demoniac rage, he charged in on the crouching officer, and brought his great cutlass down. Maynard's hammer clicked harmlessly in the lock. He closed his eyes, to meet the outlaw's stroke.

At the very moment that the cutlass was about to brain him, one of his men, free for the moment, struck with his sword from the side, at Blackbeard's unguarded body. The cutlass tore into Teach's neck and throat, and in its vast swing, once it broke loose from the pirate's body, it struck Maynard's pistol hand, wounding it.

Teach stood uncertainly upright, the blood gushing from his neck over his elegant coat. At that moment Maynard's pistol spoke from his wounded hand, and the shot entered Teach's breast.

The Lieutenant stood back a moment, to gloat upon his enemy's inevitable fall. To his consternation, the pirate glared diabolic hatred for a breath, and then, seeing the man who had struck him turn his back, he brought down his cutlass upon the unsuspecting head, and laid the sailor at his feet. Maynard, seizing a cutlass from a fallen seaman, rushed toward Teach again. A swirl of the *mêlée* separated them: he saw Teach engaging three of the sailors at once in sword play, while he in turn was hard put to it to defend himself against two of the pirates who came at him from opposite sides.

One of these he ran through, with a vicious lunge that locked his sword in the man's body; at the same instant, the other opponent slipped and fell heavily in a pool of blood, driving his own blade through his breast, until it stuck out a hand's breadth from the back. A side glance showed

Chris that Teach had accounted for two of the men against him, and that the third had turned against an easier foeman. The pirate, still separated from the naval commander, fought to get back at him.

“At him, Roberts!” he roared above the sounding din.

An ill-favored man near by rushed the commander at the word, but a sailor interposed his blade. Instead, Maynard crossed blades with a slight swarthy youth who had fought near Teach, though apparently doing little execution.

The man’s blows were so polished in their fence, yet so unthreatening, that Maynard had the chance to size up affairs on the deck. Only nine of the pirates were still fighting, against nine or ten of his own crew. As he looked, another pirate fell. Then he saw Teach making against him, at the moment that the dark youth disengaged his sword, and swung away to face another opponent.

Teach broke free at last, and in a moment’s breathing space stood facing Maynard. Blood was oozing from innumerable spots on his body; the right side of his face had been carried away with a shot, and his coat was hued crimson as the bloody deck. But Maynard was pale from loss of blood, and winded from the struggle: he had no loaded pistol, and to his horror saw Blackbeard stoop slightly, and aim the last of his six pistols at the Lieutenant’s breast. Unless this

missed fire, Maynard felt that his last moment on earth had come.

And then, too quick for words, the swarthy slight pirate dashed in behind his chief. There was the glint of light on a short gully held in the youth's hand. The knife was driven full force into Teach's side. With a stupid grimace on his face, he toppled forward on the deck.

The devil was dead!

The man called Roberts, leaning winded against the forward railing, was just too slow to prevent the unexpected treachery. With a mad shriek of hatred, he flung himself, cutlass in hand, at the youth, who stood gazing in dazed fashion at the fallen giant. One second the cutlass poised above the youth's head; then Roberts, bleeding at the breast, faltered in the stroke. The glancing blow hit the youth's head with the flat, and not the blade.

In an agonizing moment of clarity, Maynard seemed to be sensible of everything on the deck at once. The pirate chief squirmed in death in the blood he had spilt; the half dozen pirates still alive were screaming, "Quarter! Quarter!" and plunging frenziedly overboard. And the youth, smitten sorely, toppled backward, hanging over the railing as the body of Roberts slumped to the deck.

There came a call from the wounded youth: "Chris!"

Maynard stared wildly, his brain topsy-turvy. That tone——

Once again, "Chris!" more weakly. Then the youth's body toppled outward over the railing. A moment later Maynard heard the dull splash as it struck the water.

The world turned black before him in one dreadful instant. He would know that voice anywhere in the world. It was Folly—his Folly—by her own folly sent to her death in the red waters below.

Forgetting all else, he was at the railing, staring at the fouled water below. There was a black mass, hardly visible beneath him—that must be her body.

"Dear God!" he prayed once, and flung himself through the air into the ocean after her.

In the second between his leap and the cold kiss of the flood, every detail of the happy few hours with the girl seemed frozen around him, living; yet he strangely out of it, as well as in it. He felt divided into one who saw the whole picture, and another who was of every bit of it. And then the water ended this.

It took a second for him to find eyesight. There was the mass he had dived for, still sinking. Two powerful strokes, and he was down beside her, far under water. Somehow an arm caught at her shoulder, and, flailing furiously with the other arm and both legs, he made for the surface. A

bewildering eternity of dark green fluidic existence, and the brightening wet sky above him gave way to the serene blue far above.

One quick glance: he was quite a distance from the ship. Treading water, he raised Folly's head until it lay against his arm, eyes closed, cheeks pallid, all lifeless.

"Folly!" he cried, a low but imperative prayer to God out of his great desolation of spirit.

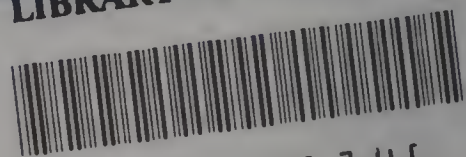
The head stirred with a quiet tremor, the eyes opened dreamily. "Chris," she murmured, smiling a smile of ineffable content.

His heart singing like golden trumpets, he struck out for the ship.

THE END

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